

# Selma Moidel Smith

Oral History, Session VIII — November 12, 2014

Interview by Kathryn Werdegar,  
Associate Justice of the California Supreme Court

Women Trailblazers in the Law Oral History Project of the American Bar Association

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Werdegar: Good afternoon. This is Kathryn Werdegar, Associate Justice of the California Supreme Court. With me in chambers once again is Attorney Selma Moidel Smith. Today is November 12th, 2014, and we have just come from a meeting of the Board of Directors of the California Supreme Court Historical Society, on which we both serve and — I might add — on which Selma is the heart and soul and the backbone.

We are going to continue, and conclude, the conversation we held on June 19th, 2013, which began Selma's oral history. Selma informs me that she has saved a special chapter of her story for this occasion. The subject is her fifty years of service on the National Board of the Medical College of Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia, which period spans the entire fifty-year history of the Board's existence. The college served as a parallel group — parallel to women attorneys — of women trailblazers, in this case women *physicians*. The college was founded in 1850 and was known until 1970 as Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania. In 2002, it became the Drexel University College of Medicine.

Selma, my understanding is the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania was the first medical institution in the world established to train women in medicine

and offer them an M.D. degree. Could you tell us how you became involved with this college?

Smith: Yes, of course. I would have to begin with a letter that I received from the president of the college [in 1953]. It was from Burgess L. Gordon, who was then president, and who was inviting me to become a member of what would be called their “ambassadors of goodwill,” the National Board. When I received this, I called him and said, “I can understand your confusion, but I’m not the Smith you’re looking for. I’m a lawyer — you probably were thinking that I was a doctor. And let me at least wish you my very best wishes.” And so, he came back immediately to say, “No, we know exactly who you are, and we do want you to be a member of our National Board. We are starting this for the first time, to be a National Board.”

Werdegar: So he had heard of some of your endeavors with women?

Smith: Apparently so, or just as a lawyer, or however.

Werdegar: That’s amazing.

Smith: And so he said, “I hope you will have occasion to be coming east very soon.” He said, “If you will, I will personally show you around our medical college, and I’m sure you will be interested.” First, he said they would just put my name on as a Board member, and I said, “No, I’m sorry, I don’t do that. I don’t lend my name anywhere that I don’t know the institution.”

Werdegar: Oh, well that’s a good principle.

Smith: And that was when he said, “Well, I hope you’ll be coming east soon, so I can show you around, and you will know us.” So I said, “Well, as it happens, I do have occasion in another month or so to be going to the East,” so I said, “I will, I’ll come.” And so he said, “Splendid.” Then, as that period passed, I did go to the College. I was shown around by him, and I did meet the dean, Marion Fay. That already impressed me, to see a woman in the position of a dean at a medical school.

Werdegar: Yes!

Smith: From the moment we met, with our first handshake, we became very good friends. And what I saw was very stimulating — something that I thought, “This is,” as we said, “a parallel to the women lawyers’ experience.”

Werdegar: So, at this time in 1953, they evidently decided they wanted a board, which I gather they hadn’t had before?

Smith: No, it was the brainchild of Gladys Daskam, the wife of a minister in Philadelphia, who was the assistant to the president of the college.

Werdegar: I see.



Dr. Marion Spencer Fay (right), honored by SMS (president of the National Board), Philadelphia, May 28, 1982.

Smith: And it was her idea to form this, entirely hers, and she always referred to all of us as *her* “girls” [chuckling].<sup>1</sup>

Werdegar: So you were a Charter Member —

Smith: Yes.

Werdegar: And who were some of the other Charter Members?

Smith: Speaking of just women lawyers or those in the judiciary who were members of this “ambassadors-of-goodwill” National Board, one was Judge Florence Allen of Ohio. She, of course, was the first woman U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals judge. And there was Judge Burnita Shelton Matthews of D.C., the first woman on a U.S. District Court. Then, there was Judge Dorothy Kenyon of New York, and Judge Hazel Palmer of Missouri, and from New York again, Judge Florence Perlow Sheintag, and then in Pennsylvania, Judge Sara Soffel. And we had a few past presidents of our National Association of Women Lawyers. Those included, again, Burnita Matthews, Charlotte Gauer, and Marguerite Rawalt, who moved my admission to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Werdegar: Oh, my goodness! That’s quite an array of female judges — outstanding women.

Smith: Yes, and also the first woman treasurer of the United States, Georgia Neese Clark Gray. And then the first woman governor of a state (and first woman director of the

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Brookhouser, “Man About Town,” *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* (June 11, 1953): “Los Angeles’ best-known woman attorney, Selma Moidel Smith, has been named to the national board of the Women’s Medical College of Philadelphia.” On Charter Meeting of the Board, see “Board Chairman Elected By Woman’s Medical,” *Philadelphia Inquirer* (June 16, 1953): D22.

U.S. Mint), Nellie Tayloe Ross, from Wyoming. Oh, we had some others from the arts and letters, as it were, like Marian Anderson, the singer, and Agi Jambor, the pianist, Grace Kelly, actress, of whom we'll be speaking more later, Sylvia Porter, economist, and we had a number of well-known authors and scientists and doctors. Also, just for a sprinkling [chuckling], we had the wives of a U.S. vice president, four senators, and three governors — and of university presidents, bank presidents, and industrialists. I noticed, and I'm sure they did, too, unavoidably, I was by far the youngest person present. All of them were at least one generation — and some, two generations — older than I.

We would stay at the Barclay Hotel [on Rittenhouse Square in Philadelphia], where we were put up. What amazed me the very first time it happened — we were due at the college for our meeting, and we all came out on the street and were going to get cabs, you know, and arrived a group of limos! The ladies, on the Main Line of course, got out of their limos and turned their chauffeurs and limousines over to us so that we would all arrive in comfort. And then they are standing out there on the street hailing cabs. That's what they thought of the college!

Werdegar: Well, this college obviously attracted a lot of capable, outstanding women who wanted to support it, which speaks to what a marvelous institution it was — a very exceptionally distinguished board, no question!

Smith: You know, I had asked the president, "Who brought me to your attention?" and so he said, "I'm sorry, our Charter Members will never be informed —"

Werdegar: I see!

Smith: — as to who that individual was.”

Werdegar: Who tipped him off!

Smith: To this day, I don't know who it was.

Werdegar: Well, there might have been many, Selma. I mean, you were not unknown in the legal community.

Smith: But I would hardly expect from a medical college to —

Werdegar: Yes, well, that'll be a mystery.

Smith: Yes, and it still is, and it always will be. There's no one else I can ask any more.

Werdegar: One of those mysteries! [both laughing]

Smith: Yes!

Werdegar: As a lawyer, were you able to offer any special support to the college, with your training and skill?

Smith: Yes, I thought of sending a letter to my fellow — as I put it in my letter — “Dear Sister-in-Law.”

Werdegar: I like that.

Smith: I wrote to over six hundred women lawyers in California — a letter which, of course, I passed before the California State Bar Ethics Committee to make sure that it passed muster before I sent it, because I was suggesting to them that they and their clients

might have occasion to consider that there were worthy beneficiaries of funds that sometimes have not been designated, that arise in many ways. And for this reason, to have them in mind. Of course, my enthusiasm was apparent from the beginning. I said, "This college is unique! It's the first medical school, and today, the only medical school in this hemisphere exclusively for women." And I said, "This college is inspiring. The graduates pioneered the practice of the profession in the farthest reaches of the world and are still doing so today!" I said, "In my capacity as a member of the National Board, I send to you and to your clients a cordial invitation to visit Woman's Medical College in Pennsylvania, and you will find its vital spirit most contagious!" I enclosed a brochure that I had put together. I had suggested to them that we needed a brochure, and so they printed up what I had sent as the contents of the brochure, just exactly as I had written it.

Werdegar: I'm sure that that elicited some favorable responses.

Smith: Oh, yes!

Werdegar: After all, women attorneys would respond to the needs of women physicians, understanding especially in that time how underrepresented the professions were, by women.

Smith: Yes.

Werdegar: Do you know how many women lawyers there were at that time?

Smith: Well, over six hundred women lawyers in California. Let's put it this way: At the time that I was admitted, three percent of the lawyers were women.<sup>2</sup>

Werdegar: When were you admitted, because that was the statistic when I was admitted?

Smith: January 5, 1943.

Werdegar: It didn't change much in the next twenty years, because the statistic that was quoted to me was three percent.

Smith: That's right, and that's what it was — which was reflected, of course, when I went to USC Law School, because the entering class of a hundred and fifty included *five* women.

Werdegar: And you started law school in '39 or '40?

Smith: Yes, '39.

Werdegar: A couple years later we were going to war, right?

Smith: Yes, we did.

Werdegar: And that's when more women, if you could speak of *more* women, I understand entered law classes because they wanted to fill the classes and there were no more men.

Smith: The letter that was sent to my own colleagues was to show my support for the college *as a lawyer*. Others made different kinds of contributions. I was very pleased to be

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<sup>2</sup> California State Bar records indicate approximately 20,000 lawyers in California in 1943.



able to make a unique contribution. And this was one I could offer to make, and they were very appreciative.

Werdegar: An excellent idea, and I've seen this mind at work on the Historical Society board, and I can see that it long preceded the Historical Society.

Were there particular national special events that occurred, arising from your Board membership?

Smith: A group of the National Board members were invited to the White House by then-First Lady Mamie Eisenhower, in April 1958. We went for our very nice visit. In fact, I rode in the taxi with Margaret Kelly — Grace Kelly's mother, because we were friends, and we were in Washington, D.C., now for this visit. So, we went from our hotel to the White House in the cab together. In fact, I can still see us as we pulled in to the guard at the gate, and we had to announce ourselves, and here we are, "Kelly, Smith," [both laughing] and it sounded so funny for some reason at that moment, and all of us had to laugh, you know.

At any rate, while we were waiting for Mamie to come into the East Room, while we were just visiting among ourselves for a few minutes, a woman approached me, that I realized must be a member of our National Board, and she said to me, "My name is Selma Smith." And I said, "My name is Selma Smith." And she said, "Yes, I know." And I take a look over to Margaret Kelly who's still standing right next to me, and she's looking very innocently all around the room [laughing], just as though she knew nothing about this, and this woman goes on to say, "and I'm from Ohio." And I said, "Well, *I'm* from Ohio," and she said, "Yes, I know."

Werdegarr: Oh, dear!

Smith: And I look at her again, and she's looking even more innocent. And, obviously, this is a set-up. So, she said to me at that moment, "I'm Mrs. Harold Burton [Selma Smith Burton]. My husband is Associate Justice Harold Burton of the U.S. Supreme Court." And I said, "Oh, how nice," I said, "because I have business with them. And I said, "In the next couple of days, I'm going to be admitted to the U.S. Supreme Court, so I will be seeing him." And she said, "Oh, good! I'll tell him tonight."

Werdegarr: Ohhh!

Smith: Well, what happened on *that* occasion — . This was just a one-person admission.<sup>3</sup> Marguerite Rawalt, the past president of the National Association of Women Lawyers, was moving my admission. There was no large group, as there often is, you know. As the associate justices were filing in to take their seats, in their black robes and looking very dignified [laughing], a certain associate justice, as he passed in front of me, looked at me [winking] — just like that!

Werdegarr: That was a wink!

Smith: And everybody laughed. Everybody that was lined up, you know, everyone that had any business in the Court, including the litigants, everybody laughed. And at that moment, the chief justice said, "Well, then I shall take this moment to welcome my colleague from California, Selma Moidel Smith."

Werdegarr: Oh, wonderful, wonderful!

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<sup>3</sup> "Selma Smith Takes [Supreme] Ct. Oath," *Los Angeles Daily Journal* (April 4, 1958).

Smith: And you know who that was — .

Werdegar: Yes, I do — .

Smith: Earl Warren [laughing]. So that was how I was sworn in. And that was just after my visit to the White House.

Werdegar: That had to be a really thrilling experience!

Smith: It was what we would call *special* kinds of events.

Werdegar: Now Mrs. Burton, on the “Selma Smith” — that wasn’t really her name, was it?

Smith: Oh, yes. It was, absolutely!

Werdegar: It was! All right!

Smith: How possibly could it be that it would be that very day!

Werdegar: Yes, really extraordinary. Everything was special that day.

Smith: Yes!

Werdegar: Were there any particular *California* events? This Board membership took you to *Washington*, and it was a *Pennsylvania* hospital. Were there some California events?

Smith: Oh, yes. In California some of the special events were a luncheon at Pickfair, hosted by actress Mary Pickford in honor of our dean, Dr. Marion Fay.<sup>4</sup> This was in 1962. And the hostess was, as they used to call her, “America’s Sweetheart.”

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<sup>4</sup> See, “Women’s [sic] Medical College President to Be Honored, at Pickfair Luncheon,” *Los Angeles Times* (October 28, 1962): H4.

Werdegarr: Well, I was going to say that. She was a legendary screen actress —

Smith: Oh, yes.

Werdegarr: — and she, in her day, was known as “America’s Sweetheart.” Did you feel that way when you saw her?

Smith: Very much so, and I can see why they said it, because the way she carried herself, the way she communicated, everything about her suggested that very kind of vision.

Werdegarr: How old was she then?

Smith: Oh, she was a little past middle age.

Werdegarr: Oh, heavens! I would think way past, because she was a *silent* movie star, wasn’t she?

Smith: Yes.

Werdegarr: How did she look?

Smith: Oh, she looked very *nice*!

Werdegarr: Well, that had to be thrilling.

Smith: And her husband was there, her young husband [laughing]. Even to visit Pickfair was a special occasion.

Werdegarr: Even *I’ve* heard of Pickfair.

Smith: Of course, and it really was a lovely, lovely occasion that they did themselves proud for Marion Fay.

And then, there was a premiere at the Pantages Theater in Hollywood of the motion picture “The Happiest Millionaire” — with a block-long red carpet, which we all walked on, those of us who were invited. This was in 1967, and all proceeds of this



For the “Happiest Millionaire” premiere — (l.-r.) SMS, Mrs. Leland Atherton (Florence) Irish, Mrs. Anthony J. Drexel (Margaret) Biddle, and Louise Padelford, Beverly Hilton Hotel, June 21, 1967.

premiere went to the college. It was preceded by a private dinner in honor of Mrs. Anthony J. Drexel Biddle, Jr. at the Beverly Hilton Hotel.<sup>5</sup>

Werdegarr: Was this the Mrs. Biddle who was the wife of the United States ambassador?

Smith: Yes, of course.

Werdegarr: How did the college or the Board arrange to have a premiere benefiting them?

Smith: That was through another member of our Board, and that was Grace Kelly. And she was the one who made those arrangements.

Werdegarr: Oh, that makes sense!

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<sup>5</sup> The movie portrayed the life of her father-in-law. See, “Westiders Join in Planning for Woman’s Medical College,” *Los Angeles Times* (June 25, 1967) WS10; and “Society to Turn Out Fit as a Biddle for ‘Happiest Millionaire,’” *Los Angeles Times* (June 11, 1967): G1, G4.

Smith: And then, too, in California, I was twice designated as the official college delegate to an academic convocation and inauguration of a president of the University of California [which took place] at UCLA. The first was Charles Hitch. That was in 1968. In fact, I have a photo right here showing — well, you can see who it is showing.



Official College Delegate — Inauguration of University of California President Charles Hitch (left), SMS, Lady Franks and Lord Oliver Franks (guest speaker, chancellor of the University of East Anglia and former British ambassador to the U.S.), UCLA, May 23, 1968.

Werdegar: I see that it is showing you and Charles Hitch and Lady Franks and Lord Franks, the speaker — a very handsome-looking group. And down below, I see — oh, there you are with your cap and gown in the academic procession. It's from the red carpet to the academic procession!



In the academic procession, UCLA, May 23, 1968.

Smith: Yes. These were superlative events. And then again in 1984, for President David Gardner, that was the inauguration as fifteenth president of the University of California. That was in April of '84.

Werdegar: And here we have the official Inaugural Program with the University of California seal. I'm opening it — wonderful. "Delegates from Universities and Colleges" — I see there, from the Medical College of Pennsylvania, founded in 1850, "President Emerita, National Board, Selma Moidel Smith, Esq., J.D." How thrilling!

Smith: Yes, these were beautiful events. They certainly had delegates from all over the world, and all of them in their own caps and gowns. It was quite a sight to see the academic procession.

Werdegar: In all its —

Smith: In all its glory [both chuckling]. Yes!

Werdegar: — grandeur and glory and ceremonial pomp.

Smith: And I was dressed in my cap and gown. I brought the one from the Medical College of Pennsylvania, which they appreciated very much.

Werdegar: Oh, of course.

Smith: And I was dressed by the vice chancellor, Rosemary Park. We didn't even don our caps and gowns without someone of position from the university —

Werdegar: Sort of ceremonially —

Smith: Exactly.



Official College Delegate, Inauguration of University of California President David Gardner, Academic Procession, UCLA, April 12, 1984.

Werdegar: And to be a vice chancellor as a woman probably had to be unusual.

Smith: Yes, she was an outstanding person.

Werdegar: Were there commencement ceremonies that you were engaged in?

Smith: Yes, those were the commencements at the Medical College itself. We were invited always to be members of the party that entered just ahead of the new graduates.

Werdegar: How large would a graduating class be, in your memory?

Smith: Well, between thirty and fifty. It would vary but would certainly be that number. And there's the photo, coming down the aisle.

Werdegar: Oh, that's a wonderful photo.

Smith: That's in Philadelphia.

Werdegar: "Selma Moidel Smith in academic procession." You look like you just got your degree! [both laughing] You look very happy. That's wonderful. This is the commencement at the Academy of Music in Philadelphia, May 29th, 1976. And what was the connection of the Academy of Music with the medical college, or was there any?

Smith: Only a place that was a lovely location and which was selected each year by the college in which to have the graduation.

Werdegar: Oh, I see — lovely!



I see another photograph of Selma Moidel Smith. It looks like there's a little breeze there. "Commencement, Philadelphia, June 9th, 1964." There you are in your cap and gown. Very nice.

Now, apart from these celebratory and ceremonial occasions, did you have other responsibilities as a member of the Board?

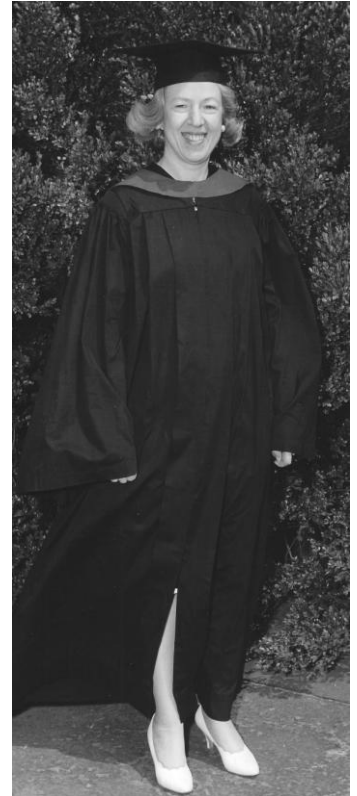
Smith: Yes, I very soon was placed on the Executive Committee, and —

Werdegar: I'm not surprised! [chuckling]

Smith: — and for years on the Awards Committee. Well, from '72 to '85, I served on that committee. And what we did was — and this was a most important kind of thing to do — the Board established a cash prize of ten thousand dollars —

Werdegar: Significant amount of money!

Smith: — to a woman medical scientist. It could be a physician, or it could be someone in one of the medical fields. It could be biochemistry — but it had to be someone outstanding, who made contributions to the medical field. It was from all the states, the whole U.S. It gave prominence to even those women who might not be getting the attention that they really deserved because every medical school wanted to have the P.R. that goes with having a winner of a national competition. This served many purposes. And women dusted off their c.v.'s and added information as to their medical discoveries in order to enter this competition. So, I was on the committee



that was to review the submissions from these candidates for these competitions, and I still have, in fact, on my shelf — a particular shelf [chuckling] — these submissions. We all voted individually for the woman that we felt was —

Werdegar: Uh-huh.

Smith: And, of course, Marion Fay was the medical expert. I'm happy to say, in each instance, I always happened to pick the one that actually did receive the award.

Werdegar: It was called the “Marion Spencer Fay National Board Award,” wasn't it?

Smith: Yes, it was.

Werdegar: What a way to honor her!

Smith: Yes, indeed. And she merited every bit of honor. I remember the occasions *very* well! And also, the publicity that attended those selections, and wherever she was, whether in a medical firm, or at a hospital, or a teaching institution, there was light shown on places that never, never would have been brought to light. It became an annual thing. We were happy, very happy, and I have a photograph here with one of them that you might like to look at.

Werdegar: I *would* like to see that. Oh, my! Selma Moidel Smith with Patricia Gabow, M.D., recipient of the Board's annual medical woman award. “Dinner at the Union League, at the National Board's Spring Meeting in Philadelphia, May 28th, 1982.” And you, at that time, I see — reading from the bottom up to the top of the photograph — that

you were president of the National Board from 1980 to 1982. And everybody, you and the recipient, look very happy in this photograph!

Smith: She has become the C.E.O. of Denver Health, which is, I think, as far as you can go!

Werdegarr: Yes.

Smith: So she has had quite an outstanding career.

Werdegarr: So she had leadership potential then, and she was clearly distinguished.

Smith: Oh, yes.

Werdegarr: Well, how lovely to be in a position to give these awards and recognition to these women in a previously male-dominated field.

Smith: Yes, and also, they served as an opportunity for a woman to stand out, as she would then join other medical groups. In other words, any medical organization that one of these winners would become a member of would have quite a different reception into that organization when they are welcoming a prizewinning —

Werdegarr: Yes!

Smith: Yes, and this is something again that women may have gotten a position to start with, but may not be moving up, may not be looked at, recognized any more for —



Patricia Gabow, M.D. (left) receives Marion Spencer Fay National Board Award from SMS (president), Union League, Philadelphia, June 9, 1982.

Werdegar: They had to pay attention!

Smith: Yes, and so *here*, when one of them reached a level, and they often, right from there, came to be offered other positions —

Werdegar: Absolutely.

Smith: — it became a very essential part, and something that they had not had before, and it was a pleasure. I enjoyed every one of them because it was a vicarious enjoyment of what they were doing. And I was so pleased, because it paralleled so much the history of women lawyers.

Werdegar: That had to be a thrilling responsibility for you to participate in that. Very rewarding.

Smith: Yes!

Werdegar: Well, I know in your work on the Board, you certainly met some other outstanding people. Do you want to tell us about some of those?

Smith: Yes, I'll mention a few at the moment. There will be others later. I, of course, would be mentioning what was previously an actress's name, Grace Kelly, but who became Princess Grace, and I will have more to say about her. I will mention that her mother, Margaret Kelly, was really a pillar of the college and had always been, right there in Philadelphia. And I'm happy to say I was a guest numerous times at their home in Philadelphia.

Werdegar: Well!

Smith: Yes. I remember the room I liked best was the morning room. It was filled with sunlight, and despite whatever winters they were having in Philadelphia, in that room you could pretend that all was sunny. And I remember very well being there on an occasion where I was sitting at Princess Grace's dressing table and looking at the large photograph at the side, on the table, of Prince Rainier and her children.

Werdegar: Well, hers was a fairytale story, at least in the public eye.

Smith: Oh, yes, very much so. We had several things for the National Board, for certain members particularly, at their home. She was most hospitable, and her mother was a lovely hostess.

Werdegar: She was a gracious woman?

Smith: Oh, yes, absolutely. And really meant a great deal to the college, a great deal.

Werdegar: Ummmh!

Smith: I'm looking at the names: Virginia Boyd Connally from Texas. She's an M.D. I have to tell you about Virginia because we still correspond, and we talk on the phone. She is one hundred. It was in Washington, on one of our Washington visits. We had one of our functions, and Virginia had heard some reference to the fact that I had had music performed at the National Museum of Women in the Arts. Anyway, she knew that I had a CD, and so she insisted that I bring the CD and play it for a meeting of our National Board. So, I brought the CD, and so she saw to it that it was played. And I absented myself, and I stood, like where you're offstage, and I could see the audience. I came back in and everybody was clapping, you know. Everybody was

saying, they wanted one — without exception, everybody. Oh, they all had their hands up. They want one. And so, Virginia said, “All right! I’m not surprised at all. I want to propose that I want to make a gift to Selma. I will underwrite that she will be able to send a CD to each one of you.” That’s what *she* did. So, I made more of them — I had all of their addresses, of course — and sent them all out. She paid for everything, for the CDs, for the postage, for whatever expenses were involved, and they were sent out — with a card from her, with her name inside, that this is a gift in honor of Selma. We still talk on the phone.

I’ll mention also the name of Audrey Mars, who was married to — well, I think everyone knows Mars Bars, the candy.

Werdegarr: So that’s the relationship? Oh, indeed we do. [both chuckling]

Smith: She had a penthouse apartment at the top of the Watergate in Washington, D.C. She had invited me to her home, and I took occasion — it was when Mark was there, on one occasion; he was a young fellow at that point. She was very interested in the fact that he was going to be an architect. We were standing out on the balcony of her lovely place, and we were looking in one direction at the Kennedy Center — she was just steps away from it, of course, at the Watergate — and looking in the other direction was the National Cathedral, and she asked Mark, “Wouldn’t you like to have a tour through the National Cathedral?” She said, “I could just phone my friend,” and she gave his name, and she said, “He’s in charge; he’ll show you about.” And so, we did in fact go, and, thanks to Mark, I got to see a lot of things that would not have been open to *me*, but they certainly were to *him*. She continued her

friendship with Mark, as well, even sending him clippings later of things going up in Washington.

Werdegarr: What a nice person!

Smith: Oh, yes, a lovely person! We were very good friends. There is a lot that she and I arranged together. And I remember, during my presidency, which was two years, not one but two [1980–82], and in fact, I declined a third —

Werdegarr: It would have kept you going! [laughing]

Smith: It was only on the assurance that I would serve as 30th Anniversary chair.

Werdegarr: I see. So you don't take the presidency a third year but you assume the 30th Anniversary chair [laughing]?

Smith: Yes, which was a two-day occasion. She called me about that time, and said, "Selma, what can I do for you, what would you like?"

Werdegarr: That kind of a person!

Smith: So I said, well, I know that a number of the ladies of the National Board would be delighted to get to see your lovely home here at the top of the Watergate. And she said, "Oh, all right. Well then, I'll have a little something here during your two days that you're arranging for. And so she did. She scheduled a nice little something, like a tea, which added a lovely thing to the two days of the 30th Anniversary of the



SMS presiding at the National Board meeting, Philadelphia, May 28, 1982.

National Board. We continued to be close friends. I always seated her at my side when I presided during my tenure as president. This was something she appreciated as well.

Werdegar: Well, it was mutual.

Smith: Well, yes. In addition, when I visited Florida, and I had dropped her a note or something, I was unaware when I mentioned a city in Florida, Fort Lauderdale, and she said, “Oh, Selma, when you’re there, stop in — you can be a guest at my club.” She said, “I’d be delighted for you to make use of it.” I was simply letting her know that I was going to be in Fort Lauderdale. I had no idea in the world that she, obviously, had that kind of thing in various locations.

Werdegar: And she was a very generous person —

Smith: Oh, yes!

Werdegar: — and very fond of you.

Smith: Yes, we were very good friends. When she wanted to ask something sometimes, she would step over to me, or she would say, “Selma, who is that over there? You know, I want to greet them, but I can’t think of their names.” And so, I would step up to *her*, apparently facing her to one side, so that I could speak into her ear and tell her the name of the person without appearing to have said anything to her.

Werdegar: Which you would know!?



Smith: Yes [both laughing]. And, at any rate, we did that — we could do that kind of thing. And she'd step up and say something private to *me*. They understood it in general, that we were exchanging information about something, and they took for granted that —

Werdegar: You were friends.

Smith: Yes. I was so sorry — all her life, she had always been a collector for the American Cancer Society, and sure enough, that's what she died of — unfortunately and unexpected, totally. And I was asked to say some words for her, which I certainly did.

Returning now to Princess Grace of Monaco, when it was time for the 20th Anniversary of our National Board, her mother decided to make a gift to us, and that gift was: she was going to bring Princess Grace back to Philadelphia for our occasion, and she would be our guest of honor.

Werdegar: Oh, how lovely!

Smith: Yes! Oh, well, everyone was just thrilled to pieces to know that she was going to be coming. I remember very well — Mark was with me on that occasion. It was his first trip to Washington, D.C. — and I remember very well, when Princess Grace met Mark, she took to him at once. I said, “I want you to know this is his [chuckling] first rented tux.” He was sixteen years old. And she said, “He reminds me of my son at home there, because he has the same height and general appearance and looks like him. My son doesn't know” — this took place in December [1973] — she said, “My son doesn't know that in the box under the tree at home, that there is in there his first tux! So, I really think I'm getting a real preview of what my son will look like in the tux by looking at your son.”

Werdegarr: Oh, isn't that nice!

Smith: Well, she took to him immediately.

Werdegarr: That's wonderful.

Smith: Yes. It was a stellar occasion in all directions. It is from this, of course, that we have the photo [pointing]. This was the receiving line at the dinner at the Sheraton-Carlton in Washington, D.C.<sup>6</sup>

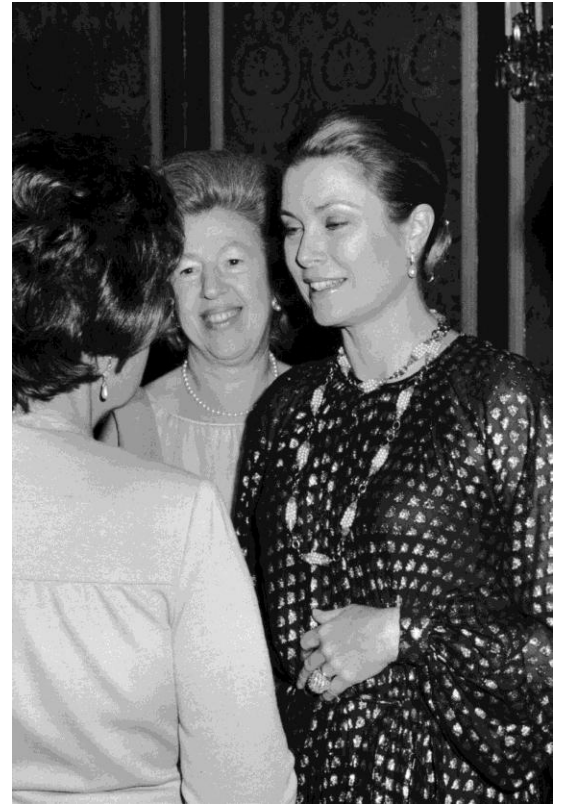
Werdegarr: Oh, my goodness! Here you are, at the center of this photograph, with Princess Grace of Monaco, "Board Member and Guest of Honor," and this is at the National Board Dinner, at the Sheraton-Carlton Hotel, and you're standing right next to her, and you're both greeting somebody. It's a lovely picture, and I've seen other pictures of you with Princess Grace as well. Well, thank you for that!

There was a meeting in Washington in the fall of 1981, and you were president of the Board at that time —

Smith: Yes.

Werdegarr: — and there were some very distinguished speakers. And you arranged them?

Smith: Yes, —



Princess Grace and SMS in the receiving line at the National Board's 20th Anniversary dinner, Sheraton-Carlton Hotel, Washington, D.C., December 11, 1973.

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<sup>6</sup> Later, the St. Regis Hotel.

Werdegar: You must be very persuasive, to get this list that we're going to hear about [both chuckling].

Smith: As a matter of fact, for all of my activities, I was very much in communication with the members. We didn't just see each other —

Werdegar: At meetings.

Smith: There were two times that the Board met — in the spring in Philadelphia and then in the fall in Washington, D.C. — and I would make one or both of the meetings each year, for fifty years.

Werdegar: That's remarkable.

Smith: At any rate, when one thinks back, you know, to that — . Many memories, I must confess, collide with each other and seek to be first. But, I arranged all of those speakers, for all of those events that I had anything to do with, by telephone, to people I didn't know.

Werdegar: I was going to say, these are pretty exalted people that you were ringing up.

Smith: Yes, yes, however — .

Werdegar: But they took your call.

Smith: I called and introduced myself and told them what the purpose of the call was, and what event would be taking place, and that I would be very happy to *have* them — for whatever would have been relevant in their particular field.

Werdegar: I see Secretary of Health and Human Services Richard Schweiker?

Smith: Yes.

Werdegar: I'm looking at a program: "Medical College of Pennsylvania, National Board Fall Meeting," on the cover here, "November 19th and 20th, 1981," in Washington, D.C., and the headquarters were the Four Seasons Hotel, 2800 Pennsylvania Avenue — I can picture it myself — Georgetown! Here's the National Board of the Medical College, "President, Mrs. Selma Moidel Smith; Honorary Chairman, Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson." So this is the program, and did you want to tell us a little bit about who spoke, or how this event unfolded?

Smith: It was right about the middle of my presidency, so when it became time for our annual events, I would put together events that I thought would be nice for the members to attend. Considering that we would either be in Philadelphia or Washington, depending upon where our facilities would be, I would call — and as you see, the luncheon on November 19 of '81 was in the Senate Dining Room — I had called and made arrangements for us to have our luncheon there.

Werdegar: That sounds very special, exceptional.

Smith: Oh, yes. That was in the Dirksen Senate Office Building. Then, on the program, a "Welcome to Washington" I arranged with Senator John Heinz from Pennsylvania, and guest speaker was Ariel Hollingshead, Ph.D. She had been one of those who had been an awardee. She was a cancer research —

Werdegar: Oh, one of those ten thousand dollar awards named after —

Smith: Yes, originally. Yes, and so I called on her and she made a talk, in the midst of which [laughing] I saw Senator Heinz come into the room at our luncheon, and I knew that he was there to say a few words to our group, because I had requested him to do so. Naturally, senators can't always know minute by minute exactly the progress of their day — so he came in at just that moment during our luncheon, and Ariel was speaking at the time — and so I saw the situation. And Ariel became a member of our National Board, so I decided there was no way around it.

Werdegarr: Oh, dear!

Smith: I stepped up to Ariel in the midst of her remarks at the podium [chuckling], I put my arm around her — which was genuine enough; we were good friends — and I said, “I'm so glad that Ariel is a member of the family, a member of our National Board, because Senator John Heinz has just entered the room and has just a moment in which to greet us.”

Werdegarr: Oh, you handled that beautifully! It could be awkward.

Smith: Yes! [laughing] And that was the way I made it possible. The photographer for the college told me later — he said, “We were wondering back there, saying to each other, ‘How is Selma going to — ?’” [laughing]

Werdegarr: One might wonder, but you really managed beautifully.

Smith: At any rate, it went very smoothly. I was so grateful. That afternoon, after the luncheon, we went to Embassy Row. I had arranged with the Embassy of India for a

visit. From there, we went to the Embassy of Japan, so that they would have the opportunity —

Werdegar: This was a thrilling entrée into exciting places!

Smith: Yes, to places I had no knowledge of before, but simply arranged for this. And they made a very nice tea for us in each case. What we did was: we then reviewed the healthcare programs in India and

Japan, so that we were really learning about them *and* making comparisons between the two of them as well as our own, of course. Let me show you the photos.

Werdegar: Surely. This is a photograph of the National Board luncheon at the U.S. Senate. Again, you are the president of the Board at this extraordinary meeting, and I want to see who was there. We have Senator Arlen Specter from Pennsylvania and, in addition to our Board president, Selma, we have William Brecht



Luncheon at the Senate — (l.-r.): Ariel Hollingshead, Ph.D., M.D., Senator Arlen Specter, SMS, William Brecht, November 19, 1981.

who's chairman of the MCP Board of Corporators, and then, we have tea at the Embassy of India. Wouldn't that have been so special! Every bit of this was special!



At the Embassy of India — (SMS, front right), November 19, 1981.

Smith: That evening, there was a reception and dinner at the International Club, in Washington of course. I was presiding, and Marion Fay made the invocation. I remember that Dr. Fay had, I think, the ideal invocation that I have heard throughout all my years, and that was [to begin], “Father of us all — .” And to me that meant *everyone*. And it seemed to me above and beyond.

Werdegar: Very graceful.

Smith: Yes!

Werdegar: And all-inclusive.

Smith: All-inclusive, yes. Then, as you can see, from there we went to the “Introductions.”

Werdegar: Which you made the introductions. And then Richard Schweiker welcomed everybody. Now here is a photograph taken at the dinner, and there is our Selma Moidel Smith, the president of the Board; Richard Schweiker, Secretary of Health and Human Services; and his wife, Mrs. Claire Schweiker, who’s a Board member. Everybody looks like they’re very happy that evening, as they should be. Next, we have Virginia Knauer, special assistant to the president — I remember her — director, United States Office of Consumer Affairs. She spoke about, “The White House and the Consumer.” That had to be an interesting talk.



National Board Dinner guest speaker Virginia Knauer (left) with SMS, International Club, November 19, 1981.

Smith: Very! And very informative.

Werdegar: What a thrilling meeting.

Smith: And I thought that this would be useful, very useful to us. Then, on the following day, we had our general membership meeting at the National Press Club, in Washington there, of course. They were kind enough to give us a tour of the National Press Building, which we would ordinarily never get to do. It's quite an institution. I wanted to mention that the last day of our arrangements was at the Capitol Hill Club, where we had a luncheon, in Washington. And I will say that arranging for these clubs was a very simple matter because our members —

Werdegar: Belonged.

Smith: — belonged. There was not a club in the city that we didn't have membership on our National Board.

Werdegar: Very distinguished Board, yes!

Smith: And so, they all offered their facilities. We had a guest speaker on that occasion, Julia Walsh, who was a very famous financier. She and her sons had a marvelous company together. She spoke about "The Economy in the '80s." And then you have the Department of Health and Human Services. This was something that Claire Schweiker had discussed with me. She said, "Well, let me make a tea for you, at least, in our Department of Health and Human Services, and I said, "Well, if we're doing that, then perhaps we will have a little tour." And so we did have a tour of the Department of Health and Human Services. As you see, it says —



Werdegar: “Tea with Mrs. Richard Schweiker.”

Smith: — and it was a lovely, lovely event, I can tell you.

Werdegar: What wonderful memories! What an extraordinary meeting! I feel sorry for the chair that followed *you*. [both laughing]



National Board Dinner at the International Club — SMS (president), Secretary of Health and Human Services Richard Schweiker and Claire Schweiker, Washington, D.C., November 19, 1981.

Smith: Well, it seemed to me that we had opportunities, and that when you have the opportunity and not make use of them —

Werdegar: Exactly.

Smith: — especially since women were coming from all over the country, you know, to attend our National Board.

Werdegar: The Board was an extraordinary Board. And an extraordinary meeting.

Smith: Yes.

Werdegar: Again, the National Board meeting, and here they are meeting — oh, I see Everett Koop, who I did have the privilege to sit next to at a dinner one time. This is in the secretary’s conference room, November 20th, 1981. And we have our secretary of

Health and Human  
Services, Richard  
Schweiker, speaking. I  
have Dr. C. Everett Koop  
seated next to the podium  
— he was our surgeon  
general, and a very  
prominent one — and then  
Mrs. Claire Schweiker, and  
Selma, the president, and



At the Department of Health and Human Services — (l.-r.) Secretary Schweiker, Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, Claire Schweiker, SMS, Congresswoman Nancy Schulze, November 20, 1981.

next to you is Congresswoman Nancy Schulze, also a National Board member.

Smith: I wanted to mention, in connection with that, that this was the first appearance of this new surgeon general. Claire Schweiker had called me and said, “When we have our get-together” — and she insisted on making a tea, as well, as I mentioned — she said, “Really, wouldn’t you like to hear him speak? This would be his very first as surgeon general.” And I said, “Yes, that would be delightful.” So, she said, “Well, then I’ll tell him.”

Werdegar: And he agreed —

Smith: And that was it.

Werdegar: He was a very distinctive looking gentleman, with his whiskers.

Smith: Yes [chuckling].

Werdegar: So this was the Fall 1981 meeting, which sounds like an extravaganza. I mean, I can't imagine more wonderful events and venues packed into what, two–three days?

Smith: There were some who actually couldn't quite keep up. I was going to say, just at that time, at the college the matter of personnel — the person who would usually be doing some of these things was ill. They thought, "Oh, my goodness, it's all going to fall flat!" And so I did many of those things, which I would have done in any event. When it came to the bus that was going to take us on tour during those days of my presidency, there was no one to do so, so I simply called from L.A. to a bus company in Washington I had never spoken to before, and arranged for them to be the one to take us to our various things of those two days.

Werdegar: That's critical.

Smith: Yes, and it worked very smoothly. I'm afraid I had them at *my* pace. When we left one, we went to another. When we left that, we went to another. I guess many of them —

Werdegar: [laughing] Some couldn't!

Smith: — were unable to keep up with that, but [laughing] unfortunately, that was what I saw the opportunity for everyone to have. I just thought it would be a shame to not make use of all of them.

Werdegar: Well, it was certainly an array of illustrious speakers and venues and, I would say, quite a tribute to the college, and to you, that everybody would contribute as they did.

And then, two years later, you were chair of the 30th Anniversary celebration, again in Washington?

Smith: Yes, well, I never found it too great an effort.

Werdegar: You spoke to us about Audrey Mars in connection with the 30th, but we didn't get to some of these speakers that I'm seeing. You had Senator John Heinz, a tea; Arlen Specter, lunch at the Senate. So here, I'm looking at some individuals that you arranged: Frederick Robbins, Nobel Prize winner.

Smith: Yes.

Werdegar: He was president of the Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Sciences. He had a luncheon for you at the Senate?

Smith: Yes.

Werdegar: And do you want to tell me about some of these others. I remember Janet Travell —

Smith: Oh, yes!

Werdegar: — as being President Kennedy's physician. She was quite in the news.

Smith: And we also had Judi Buckalew, who was the special assistant to the president, the Office of Public Liaison, and she spoke to us at the dinner at the Washington Club. She was very well known at that time and was, truly, a very active special assistant. And we visited Dumbarton Oaks, where I had the director himself, Giles Constable, speak to us and show us around.

Werdegar: Beautiful place for the fall colors in full bloom.

Smith: Yes, absolutely beautiful!

Werdegar: Just beautiful.

Smith: Then, because of my wish to inject something of the Spanish flavor, I called the Organization of American States and happened to speak to someone very nice at the Pan American Union and arranged with them for tea, and so we were taken to a very lovely tea. In fact, it was after we had been to Dumbarton Oaks [laughing]. I remember the ladies said that in those few days they had seen and done more than they had done [laughing] at any time in their lives. And they gained so much. They said, “It’s not just to attend a meeting.” — we had our business meetings, of course — but I was able to open doors to places —

Werdegar: Oh, so much enrichment!

Smith: — yes, that they would have firsthand opportunities to see and hear and, in some way, be acquainted with.

Werdegar: Can we fast-forward to the 50th Anniversary celebration?

Smith: Oh, yes, by all means! They were very nice to, again, invite me to — on each occasion, everything that I did was by their invitation to me to do it; I never sought any part of it — I was asked to be the speaker of the occasion.

Werdegar: That’s a lot of pressure.

Smith: Well, I spoke for half an hour, without notes, reminiscing over my fifty years —

Werdegar: Oh, perfect!

Smith: — and the people who made it such a wonderful adventure for me.

Werdegar: Oh, it sounds like it was.

Smith: It was! I remember referring also to Mrs. Lewis L. Strauss [Alice], a member of our Board. We were also very friendly. She was a widow — you know, the husband was the admiral. I called her just before our 50th Anniversary dinner and told her about it. She told me, “Selma, I’m a hundred,” and I said, “Well, I’m eighty-four,” and she said, “Well-1-1-1.” She was living on their farm now, which she enjoyed very much, and she had invited me many times. She wanted very much for me to come and see it and visit and stay with her. I never got the opportunity. I was very much involved in litigation at the time, you know, in trials, and I had a court calendar to be observant of.

Werdegar: I don’t know how you could handle all this and be an active litigating attorney.

Smith: Well, I was, at all times. Also, when Ruby Sears, said to me, “ Could you come and stay with me for a few days?” — Ruby Sears, her husband being part of the Sears Roebuck family. In fact, what reminded me at this moment was, I said to her, “I wish I could, Ruby, but I have to get back to my office. I have a trial coming up very soon, and my last-minute preparations for it — .” I said, “Mostly it’s done, but I now have to get ready.” And I felt so sorry because it turned out that she passed away very soon after. She had cancer, and somehow she kept us from ever knowing it. And so, she had wanted me to come and, I, in my fifty-year speech to them, or

reminiscences, I said how sometimes you look back at things you regret that you didn't do and wish you had. It was a pity, and I'm sorry I couldn't have given her that wish. It would have been lovely. I must say that when Marion Fay passed away, the college asked me to be the speaker for her —

Werdegar: Oh!

Smith: — which I did, of course. That, and my remarks at the 50th — they have kept all of that. It was all recorded.

Werdegar: Oh, that's wonderful. Part of their archives forever?

Smith: Yes.

Werdegar: And you not only gave the keynote speech, but you authored the Fifty-Year Commemorative Book?

Smith: Yes.

Werdegar: It has an annotated list of Charter Members and later members, which came out to be five hundred women?

Smith: Yes. As I had said to the group at the fifty-year dinner, "One thing I can tell you. If you're going to be a member, do it when you're *young*, because then you can be there when all the things have been done." And we decided that our fifty years was appropriate because we had achieved our mission — and that was to make women physicians — what shall we say: we brought them into where they were no longer at *one* institution, but they could be at *whatever* institution.

Werdegar: There's a poetic completion there.

Smith: Yes.

Werdegar: I see that the Board, "celebrated its 50th birthday and officially declared its mission accomplished."

Smith: Yes.

Werdegar: What a nice rounding out!

Smith: And I'm so happy that I was able to be one — *the* one, apparently — to be there at the beginning of that fifty-year period and the end.

Werdegar: Now, did the college join with another college and become coeducational?

Smith: Well, they were made coeducational along the way. That's when the word "Woman's" was dropped off, and it was just "Medical College of Pennsylvania."

Werdegar: 50th Anniversary, five hundred women, mission accomplished.

Smith: Yes!

Werdegar: Well, Selma, I feel a little bit that I've been on that journey. I wish I had in fact.

What a marvelous journey! I was very interested to learn and understand why, and hear and feel, how important this medical college was to you. Very touching. And all the women of accomplishment who joined together to make this happen! Yes, that was a wonderful era.



Smith: Yes. Again, I have no idea to whom I owe this debt of fifty years of this adventure. It was a unique one, but, as I have said, “I’m grateful for the gift of time” —

Werdegarr: Yes.

Smith: — and grateful for the gift of many friends and kind people who have, along the way, added so much to my life.

Werdegarr: Indeed! And vice versa, there’s no doubt about that — all the lives and causes that you have impacted! It’s remarkable. Are we now to conclude your oral history?

Smith: Yes, it seems that we are.

Werdegarr: Oh, my!

Smith: It’s inevitable that one looks back a long ways. I have had occasion to do that in preparation for these various sessions. And I’m so appreciative of your conversation with me at the very beginning, and that now you are tying it up with a ribbon!  
[chuckling]

Werdegarr: Well, there might be an addendum! [both laughing] This is just the opportunity to conclude this part.

Smith: I would have to tell you, in all honesty, that we have by no means touched all of the areas in which I was active.

Werdegarr: It must be frustrating if you can’t —

Smith: No, not necessarily, but this is not the sum total. Even though we've covered many things, there is much more. This'll be the last chapter, however.

Werdegar: Well —

Smith: One never knows, of course.

Werdegar: As I say, you could always do an addendum.

[both laughing] I've enjoyed it very much.

I've been privileged to do my small part, and

I'm happy for you that this is concluded.



SMS with son, Mark L. Smith, Los Angeles, December 28, 2002.

Smith: Well, I can't just sit back and rest now, as the words are used — because I have work to do!

Werdegar: Well, speaking as a member of the Board of the California Supreme Court Historical Society, I hope that's true!

Smith: As it happens, the 2014 journal [*California Legal History*, vol. 9] is in its final phases of preparation, so pretty soon — the end of December, you know — that will be coming out. As usual, it'll be somewhere around five hundred pages. And we start out, the authors and I, as strangers, you know, and most often we end up, just by our sheer communications —

