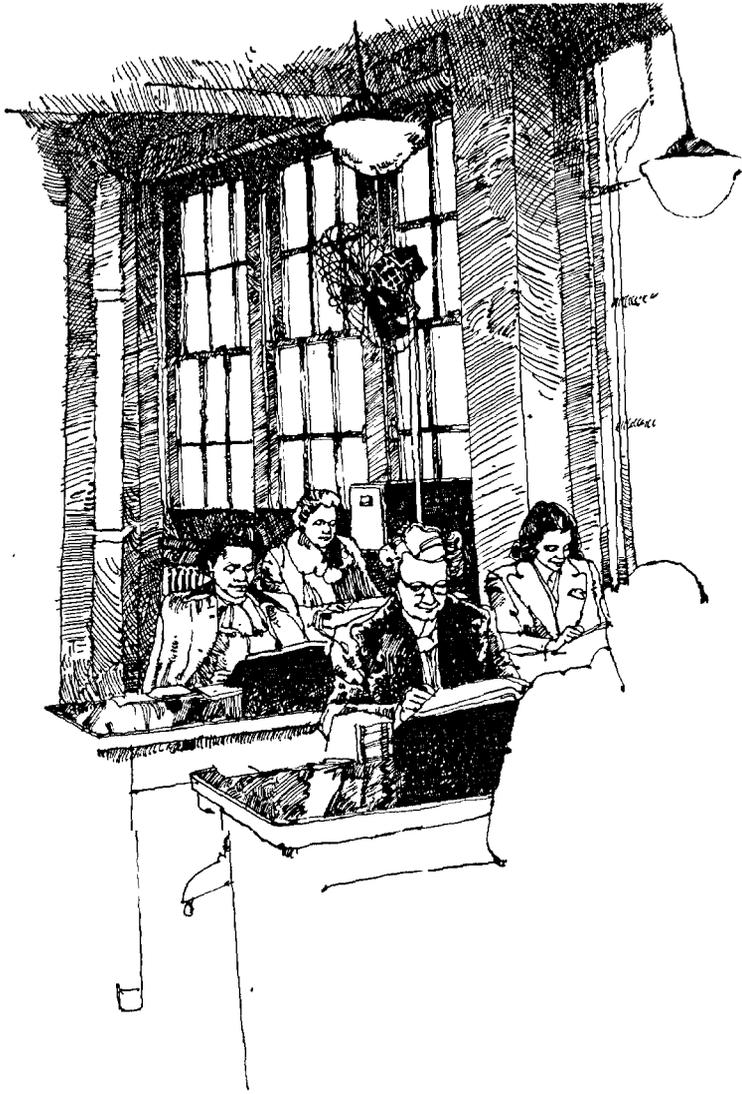


[Click for Table of Contents](#)



# Oasis

JANUARY 1977



THE WAY WE WERE

# A LOOK BACK AT BEAUTY CONTESTS, STREETCARS, AND THE PBX BOARD .

By Carole Simmons

MY FIRST impression of the 5th floor expanse of the Candler Building was that I had come to work in a factory. There were rows of files, no partitioning of units, and no rugs.

Everyone in the downtown Baltimore building seemed to know every employee. They could tell you who you'd expect to find in the files on "courting" assignments; on the stairwells stealing a "buss" or two; and the location of every "scout" on duty.

Some ladies and gents smoked in those times but never at their desks. Nor did you have refreshments at your work area for fear of mishaps that would damage or destroy the work being handled. So, restrooms literally had "a run on the business" at hand, and if one exceeded a reasonable stay, a monitor would come after the person and invite him (or her) back to the work area. Too, almost all were "tuned in" to the bell system, that loud gong denoting the end of IO-minute break periods and lunchtime.

Production. was "our thing!" Time reports and sign-in and sign-out forms and/or punch clocks were used, depending on where in SSA you were located. In those days I lived near my place of employment but couldn't get to work "on the dot" no matter how I tried. My supervisor would accumulate those 5 minutes of tardiness until I reached 1 hour and then, apply it to annual leave. When that had no results, each 5 minutes cost me 1 hour of annual leave until I was in the red for both annual leave and sick leave. My leave record showed some improvement henceforth.

Economy was a patriotic endeavor. If one used adding machines, tapes were saved and re-rolled so that the reverse side could be used. Obsolete forms became scratch pads so that the reverse side would be used. Pencils were used to the "nub" but never discarded. They were collected and provided to hospitals, orphanages, or Sunday schools for use by the children. Smokers saved the tinfoil from the pack by the pound for

sales and recycling.- We -called it "silver paper."

Aldernay was the cafeteria on the street level of the Candler Building. Many of us never left -our work areas though, because arrangements had been made to have carts come to each floor at breaktime and during lunch. On the 5th floor, everyone knew "Smitty," the operator of our "cart." He was always genial and had some pleasantries to exchange.

Unfortunately, two of the hottest selling paperbacks of the time were "Baltimore Confidential" and "Washington Confidential." These were exposes of the evils and shenanigans of government workers, with members of "the Block" featured prominently in the Baltimore edition. Bear in mind that this was some 30 years ago, when one did not even utter "damn" audibly. Nevertheless, friends and neighbors derived much pleasure in "needling" any person working for SSA.

On the other side of the coin were many nice things to remember. To recall a few:

- The bowling leagues that played in the alleys of the Recreation Lanes on Howard Street.
- The Varsity Show, with the one-two-three-kick chorus line consisting of male dancers.
- The Miss Victory Ball sponsored by the Vets of SSA. The young girls were encouraged to participate. I entered one year. I believe it began as a beauty and talent contest. By the time I became involved, I think it had become a popularity and salesmanship contest. One only had to get out and get the most votes in order to win. But being young and backward, if not reluctant to solicit votes, I became an "also ran." (How else could I explain losing.)

A sense of profound prestige was experienced on being requested to sign the "Loyalty Pledge to the U.S." and to have one's fingerprints on file in Washington, D.C. But during the McCarthy hearings, we dreaded the possibility that we would be among-or even know-those being investigated regarding

Communist activities. And the whispers were rampant upon learning that a fellow worker had been so subjected!

Then there's the vivid memory of freight elevators herding employees to their respective floors-only to find that invariably they were delayed because of being stuck between floors. That was really panic in a sardine can. Some would faint, some would become hysterical, and some would remain calm. There were no phones on those elevators, by the way.

Wall and floor fans were the mode. They never sufficiently cooled an area. If you raised a window, another wanted it down. If

## MEMORIES NEEDED

This is the second in what we hope will be a series of articles about the early days of SSA. Active and retired employees are invited to contribute articles recounting the "human events" in our history-either at headquarters or in the field. Contributions should be sent to OASIS, Room 3-R-3, Operations Building, Baltimore, Md. 21235.

you wanted it down, another wanted it up! If it were left up, your work flew out of the window or 'across the room. I often wonder how much work was destroyed or lost during those times. During winter, it was not unusual to see employees at their desks with hat, coat, and earmuffs.

There were three shifts-no flex-time-and all shifts arrived and departed according to their respective schedules, so the 5 o'clock exodus from Candler into the mainstream of traffic was something else-even then. Many of us were seen waiting on the corners (shivering in winter and sweltering in summer), waiting for the street car (or trackless trolley) for transportation. In 1944, the trolleys always provided a little 4-page magazine with interesting articles for "reading as you ride." I have one dated December 11, 1944. At that time diphtheria was with

us. There were over 200 cases, with 11 deaths reported in the city between January and November 1944.

And who among old-timers can forget when SSA was supposed to be moved to Washington, D.C. Employees contacted realtors, selling homes in Baltimore and relocating in Washington, D.C. Others sublet apartments, etc. Some employees, rather than become commuters, looked for new employers. Of course, everything settled down when we learned we would be staying in Baltimore.

Eventually, I found my way to the Supply and Service Section on the 9th floor of the Equitable Building, located a few blocks from Candler. Here was another unique operation. As supervisor of the Budgets and Duplication Section, three to four men (and myself) handled all of the duplication requests. There was mimeograph and ditto equipment at our disposal. Both were messy! Of course, all requests were "priority," but we'd all pitch in, assemble like mad, and hand-staple some of the prettiest jobs. Results: mimeo and ditto ink on us. Naturally, some jobs were returned for missing pages or reassembling. But for the most part, the jobs were done competently by the "Ink Spots" (as we called ourselves). And the Commissioner's Decisions, OGC opinions and such were distributed on time. As I recall, back then one could even 'write a memo, have it approved and released all in one day!

The PBX room (telephone room) was also on the 9th floor of the Equitable Building. The PBX board handled all the calls to and from Social Security employees. Usually, three operators and one supervisor handled the activity. If our workday in Budgets and Duplication was not too busy, we would be assigned to help out. (Yes, I was once a "call girl" in the Government.) Across from the telephone room was a canteen. Sometimes the gathering there would interfere with our ability to hear on the PBX lines. Being aggravated by this annoyance on one occasion, I

came tromping out of our room to give someone "what for," only to be face-to-face with Bureau Director O. C. Pogge. I never served in the Army, but I was told that I did the most beautiful "about face" ever executed.

My memories of what it was like to work in downtown Baltimore would not be complete without a mention of the Maryland Institute on Market Place. The Institute was used as our testing site on many an occasion. Who could ever forget the tall accounting chairs (like those used by Bob Cratchit in Dickens' "A Christmas Carol") of such height that one had to bend *down* to the desk. The chairs were primarily designed for draftsman. Those who went to the Institute for typing tests or lectures may also recall the one instructor who never dictated nor lectured without a cigar in his mouth.

All of these recollections are associated with salaries in tune with the times. I went from CAF-1 (\$1,260 per annum) to GS-4 \$3,335 (per annum), the latter providing me with \$128.27 biweekly. Actual take home pay was \$99.67 because retirement was \$7.70 and total taxes were \$20.90. To my knowledge, State and city taxes were not included then, and health benefits had not come of age. And we thought that we were "privileged" people to be working for Uncle Sam. For me, that has never changed-even with the way we were! □

#### About the Author

CAROLE SIMMONS, SSI Specialist, BSSI . . . joined Social Security, in 1943 as a clerk (CAF-1) in the Candler Building . . . held variety of positions, including coding and review clerk, correspondence clerk, and budgets and reports clerk, with BDI and BHI before joining BSSI . . . has received the Commissioner's Citation . . . is currently running for election as a Committee Member of the Credit Union at headquarters . . . enjoys writing poetry (so far, two of her poems have been published).



He promises a  
'compassionately and  
efficiently run  
department.'

## CALIFANO NOMINATED AS NEXT SECRETARY OF HEW



JOSEPH ANTHONY CALIFANO, Washington attorney and former White House Special Assistant from 1965 to 1969, has been nominated as Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare.

David Mathews, who has served as HEW Secretary since August 1975, is returning to his former post as President of the University of Alabama.

Mr. Califano has been described by a former Johnson Administration cabinet member as "the man who, next to the President, has contributed more than any other individual in our country to the conception, formulation and implementation of the program for the Great Society."

Born in New York City in 1931, Califano is one of the youngest nominees to the Carter cabinet. He graduated from Holy Cross College in 1952 and took his law degree from Harvard in 1955. He joined the Navy that same year and served as a legal officer in the Office of the Judge Advocate General.

After working for several years with a New York City law firm once headed by Thomas E. Dewey, Califano joined the Defense Department in 1961 as a special assistant to the General Counsel. He is quoted as saying he joined the Government because he was "bored with splitting stocks."

By 1965, he was special assistant

to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. Later that same year he was named a White House Special Assistant, specializing in domestic affairs. According to the book, *Political Profiles: The Johnson Years*, "He exercised White House control over the Department of Labor, various welfare programs within the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, the poverty program, the Agency for International Development program and all aspects of foreign trade." The *New York Times Magazine* characterized him as "The Deputy President for Domestic Affairs."

In 1969, Califano joined the law firm of Arnold and Porter in Washington, D.C. From 1970 through 1972, he served as general counsel to the Democratic National Committee. And since 1972, he has been with the Washington law firm of Williams, Connolly, and Califano.

He is married to the former Gertrude Zawacki of Taunton, Mass. They have three children, aged 14, 13, and 6, and make their home in Washington.

A *New York Times* article concerning Mr. Califano's nomination as HEW Secretary said that "he has promised a compassionately and efficiently run department that would serve 'all the people, not any limited constituency' and bring a 'measure of excellence back to our education system.' " □