

The Memoirs
of Ambassador
J. Graham Parsons

The Memoirs of Ambassador J. Graham Parsons:

A Foreign Service Life

Edited by

Robert D. Eldridge

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

BY ROBERT D. ELDRIDGE

Although my undergraduate and graduate degrees were in International Relations and Political Science respectively, I consider myself more of a diplomatic historian. It may be because my undergraduate academic advisor was a retired diplomat, or that my graduate school academic advisor for both my master's thesis and doctoral dissertation was a leading Japanese diplomatic historian. Then again, it may be because I am simply interested in the role individuals play in history. Or it might be a combination of the above factors.

In any case, I have been lucky enough through the years of research and writing to have interviewed and interacted with many American officials and diplomats who served in the immediate prewar, wartime, and post-World War II periods, helping to create our foreign policy and relations with other countries, especially with Japan. I have used their personal papers and, for those not previously publicly available, have helped arrange their donations to different institutions in the United States and Japan (including Okinawa).

One individual I was not fortunate enough to meet in person is the protagonist of this book, James "Jeff" Graham Parsons, who passed away unexpectedly in 1991 at the age of 83, before I chose to become a diplomatic historian. Although Parsons had a rich and varied career—serving in such countries as Japan, China, India, Laos, Cuba, Sweden, Canada, and the Vatican, among others, and rising to Ambassador as well as Assistant Secretary of State—he was not the most famous diplomat of his day, nor was he a "top tier" policy maker like a Dean G. Acheson, George F. Kennan, or John Foster Dulles. He was, however, highly respected by the State Department officials with whom he worked as someone very capable and professional. He was also a private and reserved man. Fortunately, however, for us the reader, he chose to record his memories. He called his memoirs a "hodgepodge of about fifty 'vignettes' of varied character," but the effort to which he devoted several of his retirement years was more than that. It was, as I have decided to title it, truly "A Foreign Service Life." Through editing

these memoirs, I have come to come to better know the man who often appears in the documents concerning Japan, my field of specialty, particularly in the 1950s, including the U.S.-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security signed on January 19, 1960, at the White House. I hope the reader as well feels they know him better after reading this book.

Parsons published a few of the vignettes, or essays, in various magazines and newsletters, but for the most part, these chapters will be new for almost everyone. Some of the chapters will have repetitive discussions, due to the nature of the vignettes, but they are not identical and make for fun and insightful reading. As with most memoirs, this book is chronological and for the most part, JGP's development professionally within the Foreign Service is relatively easy to follow and understand as seen by his assignments. Life obviously throws us some curveballs, and for JGP one of them was joining the Foreign Service in the first place. He swung at it and hit a homerun.

But even with this said, his career choice seems natural and the State Department appears to have treated him well although he did have a couple of serious disappointments including not being named Ambassador to Japan. Yet, never once did he talk publicly or in these memoirs about resigning or expressing disgust with the Department or with our nation's policies. The reader will be impressed with his loyalty to the Foreign Service and to United States Government as well as by the thought that was put into the assignments given to him by the State Department. He may not always have seen or fully anticipated the positions he received, but he did his best to grow into them or do well in them. Many of his assignments were in fact due to interactions he had had with senior diplomats in the State Department who personally chose or mentored him, such as Joseph C. Grew, Jay Pierrepont Moffat, and Loy W. Henderson. He was involved broadly with many countries and areas, and specifically the most with Japan and Asia. It was a good Foreign Service career for him and seems to have been a good Foreign Service life for him and his family.

High Praise

Parsons was born on October 28, 1907, in New York City, the only child of James Graham Parsons, a banker with Spencer Trask and Company, an investment firm established in 1881 that supports inventors, scientists, and social entrepreneurs, and Adelaide Douglas Smyth. Adelaide and

James were distant cousins. Adelaide was born in Newark, New Jersey (a fact she was terribly embarrassed about: "If you were a New Yorker, Newark was just not the place to be born."¹), but primarily raised in New York and Milford, Connecticut. James was from New York and Connecticut.

The younger James was called "Graham" by his mother, uncles, aunts, and some other family members, but he later went by "Jeff" the rest of his life. This was in part because he was close friends with the much taller Hamilton Southworth, who later became a distinguished doctor in their hometown, and the two were known as "Mutt and Jeff."² His future bride, who was also taller than him, would call him "Jeff"; anyone that called him "James" was an acquaintance who apparently did not know him well. "Jeff" became so commonly used, however, that some people simply assumed his real name was "Jeffrey."

Jeff grew up at 383 Park Avenue and attended the Allen-Stevenson School in New York, a private school founded in 1883, then located at 50 East 57th Street, for his early education. Jeff spent the years 1914-1920 at Allen-Stevenson, which uses an "'enlightened traditional' approach to educate boys to become scholars and gentlemen." Jeff did very well there, as a letter from the headmaster written on the eve of his graduation, suggests:

Young Parsons is the type of boy that usually takes high rank at school and college. With all his ability he is a perfectly normal boy, simple and direct, courteous and manly, without a particle of conceit and enjoying boys' sports and the companionship of his fellows. Indeed, he is a very likeable little fellow. I suppose he has faults, but I have not detected them. He enjoys excellent health and has therefore been regular in his attendance. During the last five years he has attained regularly our Honor Roll and has won also our School Cub which is a mark not only of attainment in the classroom but is given only to boys whose rating is high on our Character and Physical Development Charts. The home influence is excellent. His father and mother are delightful people of refinement and quiet tastes. The boy has had the best kind of bringing up.³

In 1920, he entered Groton School in Groton, Massachusetts, as had many American diplomats of his era. Jeff was the first one—but not the last—from the Parsons family to go there. The Groton School, an Episcopalian school established in 1884, prepared young men from grades 7-12 at the time in a strict and austere environment for public service and serving God. He was intensely proud of the education he got

there, especially in the Classics, and the total experience. “My father just loved it,” one of his two daughters remembers, “he thought Groton was just everything.”⁴ Indeed, it is appears he went there because of the reputation of the school. He was also joined by pal, “Mutt.”

In his youth, during the spring vacations, he and his father would travel by train to the Florida Keys to go deep sea and other types of fishing. As the reader will see from the memoirs, fishing was an important part of Parsons’ life and he managed to get some trips in during most of his foreign assignments, especially to Habana (now known as Havana), Cuba. In fact, he loved fishing so much he made a pond on the grounds of his estate later in life to enjoy fishing and the scenery. Indeed, an article eulogizing him in the *Groton School Quarterly* in December 1991 upon his passing has, as its only photo in the story, him holding a fish literally about half the size of him.⁵ The author of that obituary obviously knew of Parsons’ passion for fishing. It is likely that the trips with his father not only fostered this love of fishing but also were an important bonding time with his father—an imposing figure who in the end did not force his son to follow him in his banking footsteps after it was clear he was not interested in finance.

Jeff seems to have developed other passions at this time. He was a short boy by any standards, physically, but he was tremendously athletic and fit. He swam, played football, baseball, and fives (a British sport similar to handball), and was on the gymnastics team while singing soprano, alto, and bass for four years in the choir.⁶ He later came to enjoy golf as well, and home movies from the 1920s show him and a group of friends organizing a theater group of sorts.

In addition, Jeff was inspired to take up birdwatching as a result of his biology teacher, Walter Siple, which became a lifelong hobby. He liked dogs, too, having them as a child. Later as a diplomat and ambassador, as well as in his retirement, he always seemed to have a dog or two with him in his photos. He even got one—a fox hound terrier—for his wife, who also liked them, when they were engaged.

Jeff’s character was forming during these school years as well. He was honest and loyal, but of course had his own personal ambitions. He was reserved but friendly. He had a sense of humor but was not too outgoing. (A daughter added he had “an excellent, dry, and understated wit—particularly evident after a cocktail.”⁷) He was an atheist, albeit a quiet one, despite having gone to a school as religious as Groton. He became great at public speaking but did not necessarily like it. He was also later at ease with foreign cultures, but not necessarily a great linguist.

As his Grotonian friends remember him, "he was a gentle man, really of the old school. He was a very kind and understanding person."⁸

His daughter, Jane, went further, explaining that "he was soft spoken and open to debate. He did not interrupt. He was a good listener and did not wait for someone to finish in order, simply, to make a point. He gave others space and time, and while he certainly had firm and sometimes strong views, made his points indirectly. He could be forceful and brave in his ideas but was low-key in pushing them. He was the last person to put himself forward. His person reticence comes from his Groton education."⁹

Upon graduating from Groton in 1925, Jeff entered Yale University. Yale was a logical and simple choice: Jeff's father and grandfather had both attended the university once known as the "Collegiate School," as had many ancestors in his old and distinguished Eastern family. In addition, according to a family member, "practically all Groton graduates in those days automatically went to Yale or Harvard, with the occasional Princeton heretic."¹⁰ He graduated in 1929, some five months before the October stock market crash, and then headed to Europe for one year to travel and experience life abroad. His memoirs begin in 1930 when he returns from the year spent abroad, in his words, "on parental bounty."

Jeff's father had a large influence on him, in both his schooling and early career. According to Jeff's daughter, her grandfather was "dead set on [Jeff] going into finance and banking."¹¹ Jeff on the other hand had begun to think about a career in the Foreign Service, having met an Englishman while in France who was preparing to apply for the British Foreign Service. "I knew very well I did not want to go to Wall Street where my father had spent his entire life...the stock market crash had taken place by then, and it looked even less attractive."¹² Jeff, whose daughter said, "was never interested in making money,"¹³ and his father eventually agreed that he would try the banking and finance industry for a couple of years.

Jeff attended an MBA program at New York University and was able to land employment as a result of a contest at the school. The pay initially started at \$12.50 a week, but by 1932, it only paid \$3.75. Still, Jeff was one of the luckier ones. At least he had a job and was able to continue his education. He was not happy, however. Neither was his father, probably, as the family lost a great deal of money in the 1929 financial crash. Indeed, Jeff's father, a smoker, was perhaps so distressed by the financial crash that he died suddenly in March 1933 at the age of

59 in the middle of Grand Central Station in New York. (Later, Jeff would always worry that he would die young, too.¹⁴)

One day in May 1932, Jeff was contacted by Groton's long-serving headmaster, the Reverend Endicott Peabody, with whom he had communicated at one time his interest in working for the Foreign Service. Peabody, who had established Groton and ran it for 56 years, asked him if he would be interested in working for the new Ambassador to Japan, a fellow Grotonian (Form of 1898), Joseph C. Grew, as his personal secretary. Parsons immediately agreed, and even decided to work for no pay as he felt it would be a perfect training ground for him.¹⁵ He left New York for Japan four days later.

Suggestive of the relationship the non-confrontational and reasonable Jeff had with his father, and the fact that he had by this point lived up to his agreement, the senior James, who was probably sad to see his son and only child leave and not follow his path in banking, let him go to Japan with Grew. Jeff ended up staying for four years, and even met and courted his future bride there (they were later married in her hometown of Toronto, Canada). About nine months after he arrived in Japan, Jeff's father died suddenly, as mentioned above. He was unable to return for the funeral. Jeff, always calm and placid, may have felt guilty over his decision and for not being there, but his daughter never asked him, and she does not recall him ever mentioning it.¹⁶

Jeff's mother lived for another fifty years after that as a widow, dying at the age of 96 in the mid-1970s. She would occasionally come to stay with the family, although she did not like to leave New York. "She was a very strong influence on my father," Jeff's daughter Jane remembers.¹⁷ "He always cared a great deal what she thought of things. He depended on her," specially to take care of his two girls who were sometimes at boarding school when Jeff and their mother were abroad on diplomatic assignments—"she was the parent" for them.¹⁸

With this family background and description of his upbringing, we will now turn to the memoirs, which picks up with his joining the Foreign Service.

Book Structure

Chapter 1, "Beginning the Foreign Service Adventure (Tokyo, 1932-1936)," discusses the above immediate background to his departure for Japan to work for Ambassador Grew and his time there, including how he prepared for and was accepted for the Foreign Service. He also

discusses his courtship and marriage to the niece of the Canadian Minister to Japan at the time, Margaret Josephine Boulton, otherwise known as Peggy, who was nine years his junior and the more vivacious of the two. In this chapter, Parsons also introduces the reader to the visit of the New York Yankees to Japan as well as the worsening domestic situation in that country as the militarists began to assert their influence through political assassinations and nationalism. It was here that Parsons credits Grew, who sought to prevent war with Japan, with giving him many of the important foundations to be a good diplomat.

The second chapter, "Cuba Libre (Habana, 1936-1938)," describes the first assignment abroad following Parsons becoming a Foreign Service Officer to the U.S. Consulate in Havana, Cuba, which was to serve as his "training post." Here Parsons learned the ropes of consular work, as well as its importance in the lives of many people, including Jewish refugees fleeing oppression in Nazi Germany.

In Chapter 3, "Washington Interlude (Washington, D.C., 1938)," Parsons discusses learning about social protocol for young diplomats at the time as well as other important subjects at the Foreign Service Officers Training School, now known as the Foreign Service Institute. While in Washington, Parsons temporarily worked on the British desk in the Division of Western European Affairs before being given his next assignment—Manchuria.

Chapter 4, "Alive and Well in Pu-Yi's "Empire" (Mukden, 1938-1940), describes the near two years the Parsons' family spent in Mukden, now known as Shenyang. By the time of Parsons' arrival, the area had been overtaken by Japan's Kwantung Army and named Manchukuo. The United States Government did not recognize Imperial Japan's seizure of this territory, and so Parsons and his colleagues were in a precarious situation. Parsons monitored and reported, and similarly, was monitored and reported on. This chapter describes both his work there, as well as the life he and his family led and the interactions they had with Japanese and Chinese officials and citizens.

Chapter 5 covers Parsons' time in America's important neighbor to the North. Titled, "Canada (Ottawa, 1940-1943)," it examines the delicate but interwoven relations between Canada and the United States that became more linked during World War II. Leveraging Peggy's Canadian citizenship and family connections, Parsons gained important contacts and insights into the relationship that is actually more complicated than most Americans then (or now) realize. Parsons came to understand the geostrategic value of Canada, as well as its own internal

challenges between the English-speaking (and leaning) population and those of the French community, which became apparent during World War II.

Chapter 6, “Washington, *B.C.* (Washington, D.C., 1943-1947),” looks at Parsons’ work in the nation’s capital during the war. There, Parsons continued to be involved with Canada, serving on the Canadian Desk in the Division of British Commonwealth Affairs (hence the “*B.C.*” in the chapter title). Among other topics, Parsons discusses the efforts of the Permanent Joint Board for Defense and the importance of wartime cooperation.

“Eternal Rome Too Briefly: The Rock of Peter (Vatican, 1947-1948),” the title of Chapter 7, discusses Parsons’ assignment to Vatican and the challenges of working under a somewhat paranoid political appointee who chose to come to Rome only rarely, and on short notice. A difficult time for Parsons professionally, he was “fired” by this prickly ambassador but, as the next chapter shows, was quickly rescued by a highly popular Foreign Service Officer, Ambassador Loy Henderson, to join him in the political section in India.

Chapter 8, “The Hindu World (New Delhi, 1948-1950),” begins by introducing the reader to the personal, political, and diplomatic challenges of interacting with Indian leaders. Parsons discusses key Congress Party figures such as Vengalil Krishnan Krishna Menon and Jawaharlal Nehru with whom he came into contact, the prejudices that existed within that country, and its internal contradictions. India, following time in Japan and China, would be Parsons’ third Asian country he served in.

Chapter 9, “The School for Older Boys: A Year at the National War College (Washington, D.C., 1950-1951),” introduces the year Parsons spent studying at the newly established National War College (now called the National Defense University), which provided a chance for “older boys” from a variety of U.S. government agencies and the military to study national security together. It became a particularly good opportunity for Parsons to develop contacts among people of his generation, and in subsequent chapters he refers to some of these connections he made at this time.

Following the year at the NWC, Parsons continued to live and work in Washington for two more years. “EUR/RA: A Bit of the Creation (Washington, D.C., 1951-1953),” the title of Chapter 10, discusses Parsons’ responsibilities in the Regional Affairs office within the European Bureau. EUR/RA handled the proliferation of postwar regional

organizations, to include the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and Parsons, having spent time in Italy in the early postwar years was able to further observe the evolution of West European recovery and the beginnings of its integration.

Chapter 11, "Tokyo Redeivus (Tokyo, 1953-1956)," is about Parsons' return to Japan, almost eight years after the end of the war, and more than a dozen since he had last been in the country. As a postwar "Japan hand," this is one of my favorite chapters, but I will let the reader judge for herself or himself.

From Japan, Parsons was sent to Southeast Asia as the U.S. Ambassador to Laos, an assignment that surprised the 48-year-old. His time there is covered in Chapter 12. Titled, "Laos, Not Shangri-la (Vientiane, 1956-1958)," and is particularly enlightening about the challenges of understanding and interpreting local dynamics in a politically divided country.

Parsons returned to Washington from Laos to work in Asian affairs at the State Department, building on his half-decade experience in Northeast and Southeast Asia. His three years in D.C. are covered in "Far East or Near West? The Far Eastern Bureau (Washington, D.C., 1958-1961)," the title of Chapter 13.

If Parsons had been able to choose, his next assignment would have been as U.S. Ambassador to Japan. Instead, President John F. Kennedy named him Ambassador to Sweden. Chapter 14, "Sweden: The Less Middle Way (1961-1967)," describes his six years there and the challenges of dealing with a neutral European country increasingly critical of America's policies, especially the Vietnam War.

Chapter 15, "Balpa and Less: Back into the Woodwork (1967-1970)," discusses Parsons' work in Washington, D.C., again handling inspections of embassies and consulates around the world and as the Foreign Affairs Advisor to the Commandant of Industrial College of the Armed Forces (now known as the Dwight D. Eisenhower School for National Security and Resource Strategy).

While Parsons was serving at ICAF, he ran into an old colleague, Ambassador Gerard Smith, who was to serve as the Chairman of the U.S. Delegation to the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks. Shortly after their reunion, Smith asked Parsons to join him on his team representing the State Department and to serve effectively as the vice chairman of the U.S. delegation. This story is told in Chapter 16, "SALT at the LAST (1970-1972)."

In the concluding chapter, “L’Envoi: Exit Pontifications,” JGP explains the challenges that face the Foreign Service and the conducting of U.S. diplomacy as he saw it upon retiring. Reflecting on his years as a diplomat, he states that he and his wife did indeed have a good Foreign Service life, but he warns others that wish to join the Foreign Service, to do it only after serious thought about what their true goals and motivations are.

Final Years

Upon retiring, Jeff and Peggy moved full time to a home on Prospect Hill in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, they had purchased in 1961. In fact, the property had been in the family for seven generations, as his great-grandfather, New York publisher Henry Ivison, had built it in 1872. However, Jeff’s mother had been unable to take care of the 12-bedroom/9-bathroom estate following the sudden passing of her husband and the accumulated financial losses as a result of the stock market crash so she sold it around 1945 to Walter Hoving, the Swedish-born president of Lord & Taylor (until 1946) and later of Tiffany and Company (from 1955-1980). When Jeff had the chance to buy Bonnie Brae—the name they called the estate—back after he became Kennedy’s ambassador to Sweden in 1961, he went ahead and bought it and kept it all the way until the time of his death as he had been very attached to it. His two daughters, Margaret and Jane, both inherited it but were unable to maintain it themselves. They sold it in 1996, which was probably a difficult decision for them. As Jane said in an interview later, “It is hard to overestimate how fond my father was of their home and how attached he was to it.”¹⁹

Parsons became involved in the community affairs of the small and historic village of Stockbridge. Located in the Berkshire Hills of western Massachusetts, it was incorporated as a town in 1739 and today is both a tourist resort as well as a country retreat.

Jeff’s main preoccupation after his retirement, however, was the preparation of these memoirs. Shortly after he retired, he conducted a fairly detailed oral history for the Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, located in Independence, Missouri, in the summer of 1974 about his career primarily through the end of the Truman Administration in January 1953.²⁰ He spent several years composing his memoirs as well, sometimes working on a chapter intensely for a long time, and then taking breaks in his writing, perhaps for traveling, fishing, receiving

guests, and visiting with family.

During these quiet times, he worked on his house and gardens, including building a large pond on his property. He saw his two daughters often and their children. Margaret (nicknamed Margot²¹), the older daughter (named after her mother), has three children—two boys and a girl, and Jane Ivison (named after a great-great aunt), the younger, four boys. Three of Jeff's grandsons—two of Margot's and one of Jane's—went to Groton, "a source of great pleasure to him."²² (Jane's youngest son, Ben, had just started attending Groton and the family was getting ready for the annual parents and grandparents day in late October when Jeff died suddenly on October 24. "I always felt bad about that," Jane said adding, "he would have had such a wonderful time...and would have loved having Ben close by there."²³) Moreover, one of his great grandsons graduated from Groton in 2012. Furthermore, one of Jeff's grandsons—Jane's third son—had just applied to Yale when Jeff died (with the grandson graduating in 1996). Jeff would have been "extremely pleased," Jane mentions, "although the Groton connection was always more important to him than any Yale tradition."²⁴

Jeff also became involved in helping his *alma mater*, Groton, only two and a half hours away by car, by serving as a member of the Standing Committee and then the President of the Alumni and Alumnae Association from 1980 to 1986, as well as being on its Board of Trustees also during the same period. One difficult time he had was the decision of his *alma mater* to admit girls in the 1970s. "He was against it becoming co-ed," Jane remembers.²⁵ "He thought it would ruin the school, [a] typical sort of old guard." Perhaps because Margaret's children were there around that time and he got to see the changes up close, he later acknowledged that the admission of girls (in the Fall of 1975) into Groton was the right decision and that the school was the better for it as a result. "In some ways my father was very stubborn and clung to the older world beliefs to some extent, but he was also good at adjusting and admitting where he might have been wrong."²⁶ In May 1985, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the founding to the school, he was recognized as a "Distinguished Grotonian," one of the achievements that his daughter believes "meant the most to him."²⁷

Peggy and Jeff also traveled a lot, sometimes with the James K. Penfields, and saw friends and similarly hosted friends who paid visits and stayed with them. Jeff went to the salmon fishing camp of Jamie and Sybil Bonbright on the Miramichi River in Canada every chance he could get. One photo, taken in 1981, has some of the more well-known

Japan hands—U. Alexis Johnson, Richard Ericson, and others—apparently taken at J. Owen Zurhellen, Jr.'s place in Putnam Valley, New York.

Jeff knew a lot of people and was friends with many, according to his daughter. "This was one thing that struck me even when my father was alive," Jane said later.²⁸ "The network he had, the friends—mostly Foreign Service friends. I think the friendships among Foreign Service people, being rootless and peripatetic, and by virtue of being ex-patriates abroad, were deeper than most friendships. In the military and business community as well, my father certainly knew a lot of people and remained close to many of them which was probably very difficult. It was unusual." Some of his closest friends in the Foreign Service included Ellis O. Briggs, Ambassador to South Korea and to several other countries²⁹; Winthrop G. Brown, who was at Jeff's wedding and succeeded him as Ambassador to Laos, and was Jane's godfather; and Evan M. Wilson, a Middle East specialist. Penfield, who served in Asia with Parsons and was U.S. Ambassador to Iceland at the same time Parsons was serving as Ambassador to Sweden, was his best friend. He even spoke on behalf of Jeff at Peggy's funeral, as his best friend was too distraught to do it. (Peggy was also the godmother of Penfield's daughter.) General Maxwell D. Taylor was also a good friend from pre-war Japan days as well, when he was a young captain studying about that country. Many of them came to visit him and Peggy at Bonnie Brae, either for meals or to stay overnight. Indeed, they numbered so many that the Parsons had a guest book, much like one would have at an Embassy's residence. The different visitors also included Paul H. Nitze and Joseph N. Greene, Jr.

John M. Steeves, who appears often in this book, serving as Parsons' Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs and later Ambassador to Afghanistan, was another very close friend, who often visited the Parsons' family in retirement. Of their home Steeves wrote, "Their lovely estate, which they bought a few years before, was as restful to look at as it was to be a guest in. The great old mansion was Jeff Parsons' birthplace (sic)...We always enjoyed all that Stockbridge, Jeff and Peggy Parsons had to offer."³⁰

Peggy, who stayed young looking and beautiful until the end, learned she had cancer in February 1987. As described in Chapter 1, Peggy and Jeff had met when she went to Japan to visit her uncle, who was the Canadian Minister to Japan. She was just 18 at the time. She had lost her father when she was 12, and perhaps looked at Jeff, almost ten years older, as sort of a fatherly figure. "He was calming, an anchor, sort of

like the real grown-up of the two in the relationship. He deferred to her a lot but there was no doubt that he was the ultimate authority, and she was probably glad he was. She depended on him, I think a lot, and he depended on her, too. They were a good couple and had a good relationship," their daughter remembers.³¹ Because she was still a Canadian citizen, they encountered some difficulties in moving from country to country (her passport, according to her daughter, apparently read, "Alien, Immigrant, Minor, Spouse"³²), and she was even criticized by some members of her family during World War II for marrying someone from a country that was not in the war helping Canada and England at the time. (She had a brother in the Royal Navy and another brother in the Royal Air Force then.) She eventually became an American citizen, but both her daughters were born when she was still a Canadian citizen. (In fact, Jane says, as she was born in China, she could have probably had three options for citizenship; her parents chose American citizenship for her.) She probably came to understand what was required of a diplomat's spouse when she spent the year with her uncle and aunt in Tokyo. According to her daughter, she "was a really good ambassador's wife, a Foreign Service officer's wife...She was wonderful at entertaining and socializing and at meeting people and at getting involved in local life...I am sure she had no regrets about having that kind of life. She thought it was an interesting, worthwhile, and adventurous life. She was a good soldier and they were good together...She was vivacious...and easy to approach and knew how to keep a conversation going. She was decorative and really quite beautiful, which didn't hurt."³³

He continued to live in their big house alone following Peggy's passing in October 1987, at the age of 71, in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. He had health problems and "might have lived longer if [Peggy] had still been alive but he did well," Jane thinks.³⁴ Margot, who was living in Connecticut, and Jane, who was in Baltimore, would occasionally go to visit and stay with him. They were proud to see him taking care of himself, doing the cooking and the shopping, probably for the first time ever. People would come over and make him a simple dinner. He also did more traveling during this time. Jane particularly appreciated the years she had with her father following her mother's passing. She felt she got to know him "much better and have a much deeper relationship with him."³⁵ Jeff grew closer to her and his grandchildren as well. "They became more interesting and important to him. My mother had taken up such a large space in his emotional life that there really was not that

much room for anything else. Of course, he was fond of his grandchildren, but in a remote way.”³⁶

Jeff later died suddenly in his sleep while visiting friends in Lyme, Connecticut, to attend a Yale football game against Dartmouth that weekend (Dartmouth won the very close, hard-fought match, barely). He remained loyal to friends, family, and his institutions until the end. Everyone and everything were better because of his involvement. A beautiful write-up about his career was published by a friend ten years his junior and fellow Grotonian, Gordon Auchincloss, of the Form of 1935.³⁷

Upon his death in 1991, his personal papers were donated by his daughters to Georgetown University in 1996 where they reside in the Special Collections Research Center at the Lauinger Library and are available to researchers. The family still retains his diaries and letters in bound volumes from the early 1930s, home movies from the 1920s on, and a large number of photo albums covering his career and post-retirement years into the 1980s. Their retention of them has not been out of privacy issues per se but likely out of a desire to keep their father’s and mother’s memory close by. They are discussing at the time of this writing how the remainder of Parsons’ papers, books, photo albums, memorabilia, will be handled in the future. Georgetown University would be one obvious location. During a recent visit with Jane, the editor also suggested the family considers donating the materials to Groton, where perhaps a Parsons Wing or Parsons Room could be built in which his collection could be displayed. In any case, the editor would like to thank the family here for that generosity as well in making the materials available to me and fellow researchers.

Surprisingly, not many people, especially those in Japan where he spent a significant part of his career in very challenging periods, seem to be aware of the existence of his papers, nor of the unpublished 550-plus page typewritten manuscript that served as the basis for his memoirs. It was this editor’s desire to make his story more publicly accessible. Jeff had unsuccessfully attempted to have them published, but as “a very private person...and not willing to mix it up” in the tell-all genre of some memoirs, was apparently told by at least one prospective publisher that he would have to be more revealing.³⁸ “That he even wrote them at all,” his daughter admits,

was surprising for such a private man. His writing was archaic, but he was a good writer, known for writing good reports and cables. It was hard for him

to write about himself, as much as he wanted to. He was good at getting things done, on meeting deadlines. He did not dither around. He did however dither around with the memoirs. He would work hard on them for a while, and then he would leave them. He wanted to do it, but at the same time, it was difficult to do it in the way that would have been interesting to a wide audience or a publisher. I am sure he was always struggling with this. The whole thing about the Foreign Service—you keep your head down, you go along. You are a servant; you are serving the policy of whichever administration is in power. You are serving the United States and your own personal feelings and viewpoints, certainly at a low level, were irrelevant. Then by the time you reached a level where you were expected to contribute your opinions, thoughts, and candid assessments, it is probably not that easy, at least for some people, to give it. This is probably one of the strikes against the Foreign Service, as you are trained early on to keep your own counsel and your head down. It may be different today.³⁹

According to Jane, not getting the memoirs published, however, along with the fact that he was not named Ambassador to Japan in 1961 (or later in 1969), were two of his major professional disappointments. With regard to the latter, although Parsons writes that he welcomed the appointment of Harvard University scholar Edwin O. Reischauer by President John F. Kennedy, the evidence in Parsons' personal papers suggests he and his supporters were clearly troubled by it at least initially. Nevertheless, he came to praise Reischauer's appointment as the right one at the time, more in line with Kennedy's thinking.⁴⁰ He still retained an interest in Japan, obviously. Even after Parsons assumed the Ambassadorship to Sweden, his former colleagues in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, as well as Harry F. Kern, who published *Foreign Reports*, continued to update him on events and personalities in Japan.⁴¹ Toward the end of the decade, Parsons held on to the hope that Richard M. Nixon, for whom he worked during the Dwight D. Eisenhower Administration, might name him Ambassador to Japan, but the 37th President of the United States went with another career diplomat who was not a Japan specialist, something that shocked Parsons as much as had choosing an academic for the post, eight years earlier.

I am grateful to the cooperation extended by Georgetown University Library's staff, especially Nicholas Scheetz and Scott Taylor, Mary Richter of the Allen-Stevenson School, Amy Sim of the Groton School, and to the family of James "Jeff" Graham Parsons, who gave me permission to publish his memoirs in book form. I would also like to thank Grant Loftesnes for assisting with the typing of many pages of this

manuscript. While I primarily re-typed chapters on Parsons' work with Japan and other Asian countries because of my professional interest and knowledge, I asked Grant, who spent much of his life in Okinawa Prefecture, Japan, where I was living and working at the time, to help especially with the chapters in the second half of the book that dealt with assignments other than Asia to give him a broad perspective on international relations and diplomacy during the Cold War years. Grant was then at Kubasaki High School on base (Camp Smedley D. Butler, where I served as the Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff, Marine Corps Installations Pacific) and was interested in pursuing a career in the Foreign Service. I thought he could learn about the history 20th century and U.S. interaction with other countries by working on those chapters. He subsequently attended American University and interned at the U.S. Embassy in Amman, Jordan. As I write this, he just began his graduate school studies to receive his master's degree in Public Administration. He is a very capable young man and I wish him well in his future studies and career. Maybe we have another future ambassador amidst us.

With regard to editing, I tried to let Parsons' words speak for themselves and only cleaned up the text as necessary. In places where I thought extra explanations were required, I added them in the footnotes. Parsons also had footnotes in the text, mostly parenthetical comments to include biographical information about his colleagues or editorial comments about a book. For his footnotes, I added a comment in the beginning, such as "JGP writes...." My additional footnotes are not preceded by any introduction. For Japanese names, I have followed Japanese protocol, i.e., family names first. Unless otherwise cited, personal family background information was gained through interviews with Parsons' daughter, Jane, on April 15, 2012, and October 15, 2016, at her home in Phoenix, Maryland, or through numerous e-mail correspondence with her, and via her, to her older sister, Margot.

The editor would like to dedicate this book to the memories of Ambassador and Mrs. J. Graham Parsons and to those individuals, couples, and families who served with them then and those who continue to serve in the United States Foreign Service on behalf of American interests and ideals in this highly complex, post-Cold War world.

Jeff, who may disagree with me were he alive by saying the world has *always* been highly complex, has been portrayed by some historians as a Cold War hawk, but through these memoirs I found him to be someone with convictions, yet compassion, and was practical enough to deal with issues at hand and move on when necessary. This is certainly

not the trait of an ideologue by any means. Indeed, as his daughter stated, he viewed himself as an “instrument of policy,” serving others, in the true Groton spirit.⁴² He put country first, a trait that very much marked his generation, and herein lies the value of this set of memoirs.

Notes

¹ Editor's interview with Jane Lyons, April 15, 2012, Phoenix, Maryland.

² *Ibid.* For more on Southworth, see “Hamilton Southworth, 86, Dies; Internist Promoted Living Wills,” *The New York Times*, January 22, 1984.

³ “Letter from Headmaster to Rev. Endicott Peabody, Groton School, 14 April 1920,” courtesy of Jane Lyons.

⁴ Editor's interview with Jane I. Lyons, April 15, 2012.

⁵ “J. Graham Parsons, 1907-1991,” *Groton School Quarterly*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (December 1991), pp. 21-22. Although the article's author was unidentified, it was in fact Gordon Auchincloss. E-mail correspondence from Jane I. Lyons to Robert D. Eldridge, May 5, 2012 (forwarding an e-mail from Groton School officials).

⁶ “J. Graham Parsons, 1907-1991,” p. 21.

⁷ E-mail correspondence from Jane I. Lyons to Robert D. Eldridge, July 21, 2013.

⁸ “J. Graham Parsons, 1907-1991,” p. 22.

⁹ Editor's interview with Jane I. Lyons, October 15, 2016, Phoenix, Maryland.

¹⁰ E-mail correspondence from Jane I. Lyons to Robert D. Eldridge, April 29, 2012.

¹¹ Editor's interview with Jane I. Lyons, April 15, 2012.

¹² “Oral History Interview with J. Graham Parsons, July 1, 1974,” Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, available at: <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/hstpaper/parsons.htm>, p. 1.

¹³ Editor's interview with Jane I. Lyons, April 15, 2012.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ “Oral History Interview with J. Graham Parsons, July 1, 1974,” p. 2. Following Parsons' employment from 1932-1936, Grew would also make this opportunity available to other Groton students, including David M. Pyle, '32 (1936-1939), Marshall Green '35 (1939-1941), and Robert A. Fearey, '38 (1941-1942).

¹⁶ Editor's interview with Jane I. Lyons, April 15, 2012.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ “Oral History Interview with J. Graham Parsons, July 1, 1974.”

²¹ In the original manuscript, JGP mixed the spelling of “Margo” and “Margot.” According to sister Jane, around the age of 12, Margo added a “t” to her nickname. For the sake of consistency, the editor has chosen to use “Margot” throughout the book.

²² E-mail correspondence from Jane I. Lyons to Robert D. Eldridge, April 29, 2012.

²³ Editor's interview with Jane I. Lyons, April 15, 2012.

²⁴ E-mail correspondence from Jane I. Lyons to Robert D. Eldridge, April 29, 2012.

²⁵ Editor's interview with Jane I. Lyons, April 15, 2012.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ E-mail correspondence from Jane I. Lyons to Robert D. Eldridge, April 29, 2012. Also see "Saturday Evening, May 11th," *Groton School Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 10 (September 1985), pp. 10-12.

²⁸ Editor's interview with Jane I. Lyons, April 15, 2012.

²⁹ In Brigg's earliest book, a light one comprised of outdoors-related vignettes, he talks of his relationship with the Parsons: "Then there is the tale of the Japanese game warden who discovered martinis. We were hunting mallards and geese near Hokkaido and spent the night in a paper-walled inn drenched by frozen spray from the northwest Pacific. The warden mistook our martinis, lovingly blended the day before by Peggy Parsons in our embassy in Tokyo and poured back into bottles, for a superior brand of tea-house American saki (sic). His experience was educational. The next day we kept a shotgun away from the warden as long as we could, thereafter, permitting him to shoot only at cripples." Ellis O. Briggs, *Shots Heard Round the World: An Ambassador's Hunting Adventures on Four Continents* (New York: The Viking Press, 1957), p. 9.

³⁰ John M. Steeves, *Safir (Ambassador)*, (Hershey: private publisher, 1991), pp. 213-214.

³¹ Editor's interview with Jane I. Lyons, April 15, 2012.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ "J. Graham Parsons, 1907-1991."

³⁸ Editor's interview with Jane I. Lyons, April 15, 2012.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Editor's interview with Jane I. Lyons, October 15, 2016. Jane said that Parsons, who initially did not think highly of Kennedy, immediately changed his mind after interacting with him and was impressed by Kennedy. Interestingly, fifty years after Kennedy was assassinated, his daughter, Caroline, became Ambassador to Japan.

⁴¹ A former foreign editor at *Newsweek*, Kern founded *Foreign Reports* in 1956.

⁴² Editor's interview with Jane I. Lyons, October 15, 2016.

INTRODUCTION¹

The manuscript herewith is an autobiographical account of forty years of life in the Foreign Service. Escaping from Wall St. in the depths of the Great Depression in 1932, I accompanied Ambassador Joseph C. Grew as his private secretary to Tokyo where I met my wife and then entered the Service in 1936.

My principal posts were Minister (often Chargé), Tokyo, 1953-1956, Ambassador to Laos, 1956-1958, then Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, Ambassador to Sweden, 1961-1967, and Deputy Chairman, U.S. Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) I Delegation, 1970-1972, after which I retired.

In the Truman years I was in charge for over a year, 1947-1948, of the Office of the Personal Representative of the President (Myron C. Taylor) to Pope Pius XII. Subsequently, after heading the Political Section in the Embassy in New Delhi, I was Deputy, then Acting Director of the State Department's Office of European Regional Affairs (North American Treaty Organization, Marshall Plan, etc.). Early posts included Habana, Mukden, Manchuria (at the outbreak of World War II), and Ottawa.

Interspersed through our forty years were five Washington assignments up through the ranks from neophyte Foreign Service Officer (FSO) to sub-Cabinet level.

Until retirement, I began writing sporadically about happenings, personalities too, in our active life both because I enjoy writing and to leave a record for our children and grandchildren. My pieces were mostly light, hopefully for enjoyment, but friends encouraged me to think they were an original contribution to literature about the Service. Advised, however, that they were too slight to stand alone, I then embarked upon and finished an autobiographical account of my career. To me at least it seemed that a potential book had emerged. Throughout, I stuck with my original objective, which was to provide some light reading on facets of our life instead of a more pretentious memoir. I have written a good deal of that nature too, but my present intention is to add

to what, at the request of the Truman Presidential Library, was already deposited there.² In these two endeavors, I have tried to give substance to the sense of gratitude I feel for the privilege of a life in the Service and an opportunity to try to serve, however modestly, the national interest.

If this book has a theme, it may be to show how a very young man of conventional Ivy League background³ rather idealistically entered into a quite unconventional life and how he then grew into a person entrusted with increasing responsibilities, some of them touching the larger history of our times. In the process, some of the issues and events with which I dealt are described. A second theme is to outline at various levels, the organizational framework in which U.S. foreign affairs were conducted in those years. This reflects my conviction that it is too little realized that, for the success of foreign policy, not only its substance but the manner in which it is implemented are important. There thus appears recurring argument for better organization and greater professionalism in American diplomacy. Lastly, my little sketches serve to remind that a life in diplomacy is not just made up of a succession of great historical events but is full of unmemorable minutia seldom mentioned in memoirs but often quite entertaining.

I have no one to thank or blame for this book unless it be the considerable number of family and friends who egged me on, often with helpful advice. In a more basic sense, there is one person who shared not just these little “vignettes” but all else, who for fifty-one years was ever my staunch support and unselfish partner from beginning to end. Peggy, my wife, lived it all with me and loved it too, as I did. I could never thank her enough.

Notes

¹ This originally was the “Précis” and was written apart from the original manuscript, immediately after the manuscript was completed. Ambassador Parsons wrote it on his stationery, with his name and address on the letterhead. It was likely meant to be shared with a potential publisher (see Editor’s Preface). The editor decided to instead use this as the basis for this present version’s Introduction, since it is much more extensive than the original, also separate, text he had entitled “Introduction,” which was handwritten in green ink on two pages of heavily edited yellow legal paper. The editor has also added his “Acknowledgment” paragraph, which was also separate from the rest of the original typed manuscript handwritten in blue ink on yellow legal paper, with a couple of minor editorial changes in green ink. See “Folder 16 Memoirs: Miscellaneous Manuscripts (a), Box 13, J. Graham Parsons Papers, Lauinger

Library, Georgetown University.

² This is a reference to Parsons' July 1, 1974 oral history conducted with Richard D. McKinzie for the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library in Independence, Missouri. It is available online at:

<http://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/parsonsj.htm> .

³ Parsons includes the following annotation: "Born New York City, 1907, Groton, Yale (Phi Beta Kappa), NYU Business School (1931-1932)."

CHAPTER 1

BEGINNING THE FOREIGN SERVICE ADVENTURE (TOKYO, 1932-1936)

How I Entered the Foreign Service

The Yale Class of 1929 graduated not into the instant and perpetual affluence which it heedlessly expected but into the stock market crash of the following October. In later years we fondly referred to ourselves as the Class “last on, first off the payrolls.”

I may have been a little slower than most. After a year abroad, on parental bounty, in France, Germany, and Italy, and faced with the irksome inevitability of work, I had caught on in Wall Street, where I least wanted to be, with E. H. Rollins & Sons.¹ For \$12.50 a week I tried, unhappily, to explain to clients why the investment opportunities thrust into their eager hands by our salesman had depreciated in value and why, nonetheless, they should be of good cheer and hang on.

By the spring of 1932 this was getting to me just as the depth of the depression was getting to my employers. So, they told the only two surviving junior juniors, myself and one other, that henceforth our stipend would be \$3.75 a week but, if we stayed, they would reward us in an assuredly golden future.

At this point a lucky coincidence changed the whole course of my life. While abroad in 1930, I had met, in the same French household where I was studying, a young Englishman hoping to enter the British Diplomatic Service. On returning home, I had told the Reverend Endicott Peabody, headmaster at my old school, Groton, that what I really wanted was not E. H. Rollins & Sons but the U.S. Foreign Service.

So, it was on a night in May I returned from New York University Business School where my goal was an MBA just in time to take a call from the Rector at Groton. Ambassador Joseph C. Grew, about to leave for Japan, had just called him to say that a nephew, who was to have gone along as the Ambassador’s “Private Secretary,” could not go after all, and

could the Rector recommend a Groton boy?² The Rector wanted to know if I was interested.

Before dawn the next morning, I was on the milk train to Washington, blue suit, white shirt, Groton tie, and was on hand in Mr. Grew's office before 9 o'clock. Apparently, the interview went well because four days later I rolled out of Grand Central Station on the 20th Century Limited en route to Japan where I remained for over four years.

I was Mr. Grew's employee, not the Government's, even though the Moses-Linthicum Act (I never knew who this Congressional Rosencrantz and Guildenstern team was) authorized Private Secretaries to Ambassadors at \$3000 a year—more than new Foreign Service Officers received. As the Congress appropriated nothing to implement this law, the emoluments of office, moneywise, were zero but the benefits were enormous—a small apartment in the Embassy, diplomatic (hence duty free) status but, beyond price, also congenial, was the training under a master of the profession.

Dimly appreciating, as I faced Mr. Grew, the enormity of my good fortune, I had agreed to go for no pay at all, thus perfecting my record of ever less remunerative employment. However, on the S. S. *President Coolidge*, 17 days out of Golden Gate to Yokohama, the Ambassador, who had already started me typing by the touch system, as he did, told me he just couldn't have somebody working for nothing. So, on arrival on June 6, I began earning at \$50 a month—soon raised to \$100, where it remained until October 1936.

It truly was an unusual privilege to work for the Grews. They accepted me as though I were family from the beginning and right away, I was taken along for Mr. Grew's 52nd birthday in Honolulu with his Harvard classmate, Walter Dillingham. I remember this occasion because it involved a near crisis in my employment.

On the *Coolidge*, a day out, the Ambassadors—as formidable as she was charming and, betimes, mischievous, had directed me to go to the ship's shop with the improbable object of buying her a bathing suit. In those days I would have been embarrassed to buy a lady a handkerchief but off I went on my miserable errand and returned, fearfully, with a garment which Mrs. Grew, no longer mischievous but concerned, pronounced too large but acceptable. It became a serious matter for me after the birthday party when, afloat through the Waikiki surf in an outrigger canoe, Mrs. Grew capsized and the garment proved indeed outsized. Fortunately, inexperience in such matters was not held against me although I never had, nor sought, a second chance in this department.

My duties at the Embassy, initially handling only personal affairs, check writing, routine letters, acceptances, regrets, visitor greeting, and a