

**Three Great Civil Servants:  
William Hunter, Alvey Augustus Adee, and Wilbur J. Carr**

A talk by Peter Bridges at the DACOR Bacon House, Washington, D.C.  
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I am grateful to DACOR for inviting me to give this talk – my second talk in this Honorable house—and I am especially pleased that this Forum is being presented in conjunction with both the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and the Office of the Historian of the Department of State.

I hope that no one has been scared away by the title – “Three Great Civil Servants.” Does that sound like Dr. Dryasdust times three? I hope not. These were three interesting men, William Hunter and Alvey Augustus Adee and Wilbur J. Carr, and for well over a century – from 1829, in the Administration of Andrew Jackson, until 1937, in Franklin Roosevelt’s second term – they basically ran the State Department. During these 108 years the Secretaries of State came and went – 38 of them – but the overlapping careers of Hunter, Adee and Carr provided the kind of deep experience, wise guidance and stability that any country’s foreign ministry might need; the sort of continuity that is lacking in our own foreign ministry today.

It all started with William Hunter, who worked his way up in the Department to become the Chief Clerk, then the number-two job in the Department, in 1852.

The second in the trio was Alvey Adee, who started working in the Department in 1877, served for nine years under Hunter, and then succeeded him. And when Adee died, still in office, in 1924, his successor Wilbur Carr had been working under Adee for over three decades.

This century-plus from Jackson to FDR was of course a century that saw tremendous change in both our country and our Department. When Hunter entered the Department in 1829, the population of the United States was less than thirteen million; the professional population of the State Department comprised a dozen men who were styled clerks and were supervised by the Chief Clerk; and it was only fourteen years since Andrew Jackson at New Orleans had prevented the British from taking control of the Mississippi Valley and stopping our expansion westward. A century passed, and when Wilbur Carr left the Department in 1937 to go to Prague, America’s population was over 122 million; American territory extended far into the Western Pacific; the Department had eight hundred staff members in Washington. And just a decade later, of course, the eight hundred had, in the wake of World War II, become thousands.

What I want to do, in a fairly brief talk, is tell you about the career, and the personal life, of each of these three men, Hunter, Adee, and Carr.

Let me start by telling you how I first got interested in these men. My first job after I entered the Foreign Service in 1957 was in the Department’s Bureau of European Affairs. There was still, in 1957, a Correspondence Review Staff in the Department, headed by Mrs. Blanche Halla. (I think a

number of us still remember Mrs. Halla. I was pleased when Dick Parker mentioned her in an interview he gave the *Foreign Service Journal* last year.) She and her staff did their best to ensure that what was written in the Department was precise and coherent. Someone told me that Mrs. Halla was a sort of vestige, a lady left over from the days of Wilbur J. Carr. I did not forget that – but who was this Mr. Carr?

Soon enough I got to know that Mr. Carr had been "the father of the Foreign Service," the man for whom the Wilbur J. Carr Award was named. At some point I read the 1960 biography of Carr by Katharine Crane, who had herself worked in the Department for a number of years. And around the time that I was sent to the Embassy at Prague, in 1971, George Kennan published a book called *From Prague After Munich*, which included not only dispatches but private memoranda he had written when he was stationed there in 1938-39. Kennan made a couple of favorable references to Minister Carr as a pleasant old gentle man and a first-rate chief of mission. (When Carr served in Prague, I might note, he was some years younger than I am now, and decades younger than Kennan was when he published his last book.)

Slowly I became aware, too, that Carr had been the last of a great trio; and slowly I decided that there was more to be written about each the three. Katharine Crane had written a perfectly good Carr biography, but I wanted to know more about what he had done as Minister to Czechoslovakia, and after reading his diaries in the Library of Congress and delving into the National Archives, I published an article on Mr. Carr at Prague in the journal *Diplomacy & Statecraft*.

What about Alvey Augustus Adee? Carr had wanted to write a memoir of Adee, based on his own recollections of the man, but he had still not done so when he died in 1942. I found quite a lot about Adee, much of it in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, and I did a piece on him that also came out in *Diplomacy & Statecraft*.

Then there was William Hunter, about whom, so far as I could see, nothing had been written beyond entries in biographical dictionaries. I made a stab at finding information on Hunter, but I could not find enough to justify an article until all the old issues of both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* were digitalized, online. That gave me what seemed enough information, and my article on Hunter came out, again in *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, this past June.

I should add that our colleagues Frank Crigler, Bart Moon, and Henry Mattox, who put out the electronic journal *American Diplomacy*, kindly republished my Carr and Adee articles online some time ago, and Henry is about to put my Hunter article online, too.

Now, as to William Hunter: He was not the first of his name in American diplomacy. His father, an elder William Hunter, was a U.S. Senator from Rhode Island, and then in 1834 he was sent by Andrew Jackson to be our first Minister to Brazil, where until then the American envoy had only held the title of Charge d'Affaires. (In fact, until Hunter went to Brazil, our only envoy in Latin America who bore the title of Minister was the Minister to Colombia. Most of you probably know that until 1893 we had no ambassadors or embassies abroad, only ministers and legations.) By the time the elder Hunter went to Rio, the younger Hunter had already entered the Department as a

clerk, thanks to his father's friendships with both President Jackson and his Secretary of State, Martin Van Buren.

Young Hunter was perhaps not a fast riser. It took him two decades to rise from the bottom rank in the Department's clerkdom to the job of number-two clerk, just below the Chief Clerk. But, after all, being number-two clerk meant being number-three in the Department. And when the Chief Clerk died in 1852, Hunter at the age of 47 was promoted to replace him. A year later, Mr. A. Dudley Mann was brought in, to become the Department's number-two with the title of Assistant Secretary, and Hunter dropped to number-three, the Second Assistant Secretary. Dudley Mann left the Department two years later, and when the Civil War began he joined the Confederacy. William Hunter stayed in the Department, and he stayed a long time. He died at the age of eighty, in 1886, still in office, after spending fifty-seven years in the Department under twenty-one Secretaries of State.

I think William Hunter was not what you would call a flamboyant man. He stayed in the background. Last month my wife and I visited the Alaska state museum in Juneau. We found a large painting there, showing Secretary of State Seward and others at the signing of the 1867 treaty for the acquisition of Alaska. Fifth from the left – toward the background – stands a certain William Hunter; the caption says of him “position unknown.” (I of course told the curator who he was.)

There were at least a couple of occasions where Hunter seems to have been a useful scapegoat for a Secretary of State. The first occasion came in 1852, when Daniel Webster signed two contradictory letters on the question of Peruvian sovereignty over islands that were prime sources for guano, which was then the prime fertilizer for American agriculture. Webster tried to blame Hunter, but it became clear to the President – Millard Fillmore – that Webster could no longer function as Secretary of State. He died soon afterward.

The other occasion came in 1861, soon after the onset of the Civil War. The Department received a letter alleging that former President Franklin Pierce was a member of a pro-Confederate organization, the Knights of the Golden Circle. Secretary Seward wrote Pierce that he would like to hear from the former President on the matter. Pierce was furious, and wrote Seward that he was surprised Seward would lend any credence to such a report. Seward apologized and blamed Hunter, the drafter of the letter.

Hunter lived for many years at 3327 N Street in Georgetown, and in general I think he lived a pleasant life. An 1876 newspaper column described him as "a gentleman of cultivated tastes, and maybe seen coming from Georgetown on the horse cars every morning with his dispatch box, and reading some old classic." When in 1879 he reached the fiftieth anniversary of his entry into the Department's service, a banquet was given in his honor and the Department closed for half a day. President Rutherford B. Hayes paid a call on him, an unprecedented thing for a President to do. The press called Hunter "the mentor and authority of the Department." It was an honorable life and also a life with some sorrows. By the time old Mr. Hunter died in 1886, he had lost his wife, his daughter had been widowed, and his son, also a William Hunter, had died in the Washington insane asylum. The *Washington Post* said that the elder Hunter's death had left a void in the Department that was not likely to be filled. The paper turned out to be dead wrong.

Hunter's successor Alvey Augustus Adee was perhaps the most interesting of the three men; certainly he was the most eccentric. Adee was born in New York in 1842, the son of a naval surgeon who died when Alvey was two, so that he was raised by his mother alone. When he was a teenager he seems to have dreamed of becoming a professor; like many teenagers he wrote a number of poems, some of them dedicated to girls or women. One poem speaks of "my far away birdie, once my own," and another says sadly that "too slight was my fancy's mesh for birdie." That sounds like less than robust passion for Birdie, whoever she may have been. Adee never married; for years he shared a house in the countryside near Laurel, Maryland, with his brother.

But let me go back to the young Adee. When he was 25, in 1867, and still unsure what he wanted to do in life, he went on a long tour of Europe. It was a strenuous tour; he marched across the Alps at an average speed of 16 miles a day, which is extremely good for mountain walking even if he was not assaulting the peaks. After he returned to New York, an uncle introduced him to Daniel Sickles, the new American Minister to Spain, and Sickles invited him to become his private secretary at Madrid.

If you don't know all about Sickles, you might read the recent book about him by Thomas Keneally which is called *American Scoundrel*. Sickles first became famous for having shot his wife's lover to death in Lafayette Square, after which he was acquitted on grounds of mental illness, the first such acquittal in our legal history. In the Civil War he was a bumbling general at Gettysburg, where he endangered the Union position on Cemetery Ridge by moving his men too far forward, and where he also lost a leg. At Madrid he began a love affair with the former Queen of Spain. In any case he treated young Adee well. More importantly, at Madrid Adee became friends with Sickles' number-two, the secretary of legation, John Hay, who had been one of Abraham Lincoln's two private secretaries throughout the Civil War. Hay took a liking to Adee, and three decades later, when John Hay became the Secretary of State, Alvey Adee was his invaluable helper.

After Hay returned to the United States, Adee replaced him as the secretary of legation. He spent almost eight years at Madrid; he served under several Ministers, and in between Ministers he served as Charge d'Affaires for many months. His greatest feat came in 1876. William Tweed – "Boss" Tweed – the notoriously corrupt New York politician, had finally been sent to jail the year before but had escaped. The Department learned that Tweed was on a ship bound from Cuba to the Spanish port of Vigo, and cabled Adee to arrange for his arrest if possible. Adee had no photograph of Tweed, but he did have an American magazine containing one of the famous caricatures of Tweed by Thomas Nast. He gave that to the Spanish authorities, and when the ship in question reached Vigo they had no trouble identifying Tweed although he was dressed as a Spanish sailor. And then, although there was no extradition treaty between Spain and the United States, Adee convinced the Spanish to extradite Tweed, after which Adee pushed successfully for a treaty.

When Adee finally left Madrid in 1877 he hoped for another post abroad, but he did not get one. Instead he went into the Department, to work under Second Assistant William Hunter. The Department was getting bigger. It now had eighty employees in Washington, organized in several bureaus, including a First and a Second Diplomatic Bureau. Like the geographical bureaus in today's Department, these did the basic work of maintaining our diplomatic relations with other

governments. Within a year after Adee's arrival, the two bureaus were made one, and Alvey Adee, not quite 36 years old, was named the chief of *the* Diplomatic Bureau.

This was the beginning of three decades during which Alvey Adee became, and remained until at least 1909, the undisputed authority on American diplomacy. These were the decades in which the northern world, already dominant in world affairs, experienced the intensification of nationalism, the strengthening of both industrial capitalism and the socialist movement, the weakening of liberalism and the growth of imperialism, and a boom in armaments. All this increasingly affected American foreign relations, which in addition to Europe had to deal with serious problems in Latin America, Asia, and the Pacific, especially as the 19<sup>th</sup> century neared an end. Earlier, Washington was not quite so busy; Henry Adams recalled the 1880's in Washington as a period that was "wearisome and stale." The State Department did not even work an eight-hour day; after 1883 the office hours were 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., with a half-hour for lunch.

Alvey Adee clearly believed in the adage *Mens sana in corpore sano*. He took up canoeing on the Potomac, and then bicycling. He rode his bicycle to and from work, and then in the 1890's he began annual cycling trips to Europe. He took as much as two months' leave each spring – which successive Secretaries of State presumably granted him because they could count on his management of the Department when they went off on their own summer vacations. Adee would do two thousand miles or more through Europe on his "wheel," often with Alexander Thackara, a senior consular officer and the son-in-law of General William T. Sherman. Once, cycling through England and Scotland in 1895, he is said to have encountered a fellow American named Woodrow Wilson, and to have continued his tour together with the future president. In 1908 Adee told the press with some pride that in fourteen such cycling trips he had done a total of 30,000 miles, sometimes riding sixty miles a day.

We know considerably more about Alvey Adee's achievements in the State Department than we do about those of William Hunter. Adee was the strong man behind more than one weak Secretary of State. Perhaps a couple of examples will suffice. When the United States declared war on Spain in 1898, the Secretary of State was John Sherman, and he was old and half-senile. The Assistant Secretary was William R. Day, who had no experience in foreign affairs or even in politics. The State Department got little guidance from the President, William McKinley. It fell to Adee to manage the diplomatic side of the war. He had a cot put in his office, and he slept there many nights, sometimes even deciphering incoming telegrams after the code clerk had gone home. Adee did not manage the conduct of the war, but he helped to keep other governments neutral as the U.S. carried out a short and victorious military campaign.

Two years later came the Boxer Rebellion in China. Adee's friend John Hay was now the Secretary of State. In early August, with the foreign legations in Beijing under siege, Hay suddenly left Washington for his country house in New Hampshire, suffering from what the papers called nervous exhaustion. The Assistant Secretary, David J. Hill, was out of town; it was summer, after all! This left Adee in charge. Again he had a cot put in his office, and again he handled Washington's communications with other concerned governments until, in the late evening of August 20, a telegram arrived from our Minister in Beijing: the siege had been lifted.

That was not quite the end of the China crisis. Kaiser Wilhelm in Berlin called for bringing to justice the perpetrators of the crimes committed against foreigners in Beijing. It was a foolish thing to do, a little like the proposal during the Somali civil war to bring Somali “war criminals” before a court. Adee helped calm the waters, keeping Secretary Hay properly informed of what he was doing.

My first post abroad was Panama, and one example of Adee's work that I like to recall had to do with Panama, in the days leading up to Panama's declaration of independence in 1903 and our treaty with the new republic that gave us the right to build the Canal. Until 1903 Panama was part of Colombia, which was willing to grant the United States the "use" for a certain period of a five-kilometer strip on either side of the canal. Adee insisted that this was not enough, and in our 1903 treaty with Panama we got exactly what Adee wanted: not the use, but the grant in perpetuity, of a Zone that was not ten kilometers but ten miles wide.

In 1909 the State Department was reorganized and a new high-level position was added, that of Counselor of the Department. That left Alvey Adee no longer number-three, but number-four. Whether Adee was much worried by the change is not clear to me. He continued doing what he did best, which was everyday contract with the foreign ambassadors and ministers in Washington, and drafting or redrafting diplomatic notes and instructions to the field that embodied his great knowledge and experience. The story is that one day Secretary of State Philander Knox called Adee in to ask if he thought the United States should recognize a new government in China. Knox supposed that Adee would bring volumes of data with him, but he came into Knox's office with just an ear-trumpet – he had become quite deaf – and a brief memorandum citing precedents since 1792. Knox thought later that he had better ask someone else to check what Adee had told him, which turned out to be completely accurate. Adee had both a great memory and great intellectual curiosity. On his 1910 European cycling trip, one of his companions was injured while they were wheeling through Germany, and the party had to stop for two weeks at Rothenburg ober Tauber. Adee spent the time happily with his portable microscope, searching for diatoms in the city's fountains, which he understood had not been cleaned out for several centuries.

Adee kept on with his long summer cycling trips in Europe. When he left for Europe as usual in 1913, the world seemed pointed toward a major war. The *Boston Evening Transcript* commented that if Adee had thought war imminent he would not have gone, and his departure “will do more to calm the fevered brows of jingoes looking for a fight than any other thing could possibly have done.” In the spring of 1914 Adee sailed again for Europe, to attend a long conference on the island of Spitzbergen being held in Norway. He wrote a cousin that if he could break away by the first of August, he would do a three-week ride, starting in Paris where he had left his cycle. But that was the August of the guns, and instead of a bike ride he had to make his way home, with some difficulty, together with an estimated 60,000 American tourists who had been caught in Europe by the outbreak of the Great War.

Adee never regained possession of the bicycle he had left in Paris, and he never bought another, although I suspect cycling might have helped him maintain his strength and vigor. He was in his early seventies now, and after Woodrow Wilson made William Jennings Bryan his Secretary of State, times became more difficult for Adee. Bryan was mainly intent on applying the political spoils system and seemed uninterested in learning anything about diplomacy. Bryan was replaced

as Secretary by a more competent man, Robert Lansing, in 1917, but now it became clear that even the Secretary of State had less influence than Wilson's unofficial foreign-affairs adviser, Colonel Edward M. House. Adee talked of retiring, but he stayed on after the World War ended, after Lansing had been replaced as Secretary by Bainbridge Colby, and Colby by Charles Evans Hughes. Indeed he stayed on until the end – his end. Alvey Adee collapsed and died at the age of 81 on the Fourth of July in 1924, still the Second Assistant Secretary. As the press said, he had realized his wish, which was to die in harness.

Just three days before Alvey Adee died, a momentous piece of legislation had gone into effect – momentous at least for those concerned with the conduct of American foreign affairs. This was the Rogers Act of 1924, which created our unified, career Foreign Service. The bill had been sponsored by Representative John Jacob Rogers of Massachusetts and, as Katherine Crane wrote, it was a triumph for Wilbur J. Carr, the third in the trio of great servants of the Department.

In 1924 Mr. Carr was completing his thirty-second year in the Department of State. He had entered the Department in 1892 as a twenty-one-year-old stenographer-typist, with an annual salary of one thousand dollars, not very much money even in those days. Carr came from humbler beginnings than either William Hunter or Alvey Adee; he was a farm boy from Ohio who had attended a commercial college in Kentucky. Carr's intelligence and drive attracted Adee's attention soon after Carr joined the Department, and the Second Assistant Secretary started helping the young man to broaden his interests both in our own government and in the world abroad. It does not seem he needed to encourage Carr to work hard. We still have Carr's diaries, and they tell of him sometimes going home to his wife for dinner and then returning to the Department to work past midnight. Rather incredibly he also found time to study law, and he received a bachelor's degree in law in 1894 and a master's in 1899.

Carr married a young woman from Washington named Mary Eugenia Crane in 1897. They were happy in the first years of their marriage, and we can read in his diaries of weekend outings they took on their bicycles, not long-distance tours like those of Mr. Adee but rambles around the city and across the Potomac to Arlington, which was still a country place. Sorry to say, after several years she began to suffer from mitral stenosis, which is often the result of rheumatic fever. Today she would probably have valve-replacement surgery. In the early 1900s that was not an option, and she suffered increasingly until she died in 1911. Her husband kept on going, and going up. In 1896, just four years after he had entered the Department, Carr became Acting Chief Clerk of the Department. In 1902 he became chief of the Department's Consular Bureau and the Director of the Consular Service; and he kept this job until 1924.

A century ago the consular function was in some ways more important than it is now. In 1900, for example, we had just 42 diplomatic missions, but there were 291 American consulates and consulates general, plus 395 consular agencies. There was, however, no crossover between diplomatic and consular jobs, and the push for an equitable career service, or services, had not gone far. Two colleagues of ours, William Barnes and John Heath Morgan, authored a volume on the Foreign Service that the Department's Historical Office published in 1961, and I think no one has said more honestly or succinctly what they wrote about the American diplomatic and consular establishment in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: the diplomatic service was restricted to a small group of the relatively wealthy, and the consular service was the victim of the political spoilsman.

Which is not to say that people did not see the need for reform. As early as 1868 a joint committee of Congress had proposed creating dual career services, diplomatic and consular, with entry to be based on a competitive examination. In 1883 the Civil Service Act became law, and it established the principle of selection by competitive examination for all appointments to the classified civil service, but it excluded presidential appointments to diplomatic and consular positions.

No one wanted reform of the system more than Wilbur Carr. It was he who helped shape the Lodge Act of 1906, and who drafted President Theodore Roosevelt's Executive Order of June 27, 1906, the two measures which established a career consular service on an equitable basis. Reform on the diplomatic side was also proceeding apace; President Roosevelt had issued an Executive Order in 1905 requiring that vacancies in lower-ranking diplomatic jobs – but not chiefs of mission – should be filled by transfer, promotion, or appointment after a competitive examination. In 1909, an Executive Order of President Taft conferred Civil Service status on diplomatic officers – but only those below the rank of minister or ambassador.

Carr wanted more. As early as 1918 he was writing in his diary that in any country that had separate diplomatic and consular services, the diplomatic service tended to be too aristocratic and unrepresentative of the nation, while the consular service was in general more democratic. He wanted a united service, composed of men – and in those days it was only a question of men – who did not need to have private means, who would be promoted on a fair basis, and who would stay on for a career, acquiring the experience that the country needed. Carr worked for this for years, ensuring his superiors' support for the new Foreign Service and eventually drafting the bill that Congressman Rogers sponsored. The Act of 1924 had Rogers's name on it, but it was Carr's triumph.

We all know that that was not the end of the story. America's diplomats in those days did, indeed, tend to be American-style aristocrats, products of eastern prep schools and Yale or Harvard. One of them, Hugh Gibson – an accomplished ambassador, to give him due credit – once said that the best picture of a sweating man was a consul at a diplomatic dinner. Officers like him thought they had “a pretty good club,” to use the title of the 1978 book by Martin Weil, and they did not want to admit consuls, not to speak of Jews or blacks. In spite of their opposition, things of course finally changed. In the first five years after World War II, Ivy League graduates were 27.5% of officers appointed to the Foreign Service; a decade later that figure had dropped to 16.1%. But it took years more to give minorities and women equal opportunity. By then Mr. Carr was long gone.

When Franklin D. Roosevelt became President in 1933, Wilbur J. Carr was the grand old man of the Department, just as Hunter and Adee had been, decades earlier. Since 1924 he had been the Assistant Secretary, the Department's number-three job since the number-two now had the title of Under Secretary. Carr was really not so old – at least not from my point of view – but he reached retirement age, 65, in 1935 and was only kept on by an Executive Order of the President, who seemed to like him. But the situation in the Department was bad. The Secretary of State was Cordell Hull, who kept his own advice and did not share his thinking with his subordinates. Sumner Welles, Hull's deputy as Under Secretary, was much the same, and all too often Welles went around Hull to his friend the President. The Great Depression had come, and despite Carr's best efforts the Congress made serious cuts in funding for the State Department and the Foreign

Service. George Kennan was then serving at Riga, and he recalled years later that the total cut in his remuneration had amounted to something like sixty percent of what he had been receiving.

Carr confided to his diary in 1937 that he saw nothing but bleakness ahead. No one was happy, no one was trusted, no one was informed. It was the worst administered Department he had seen in the 45 years he had spent there. He told himself that he would not be surprised if he was asked to leave – and he was. One day in June 1937 Secretary Hull called him in and said that the President wanted him to go as Minister to Prague. Some years earlier Carr had remarried. His second wife was a well-to-do lady from Michigan, Edith Koon, and it was her money that had bought the Carrs a pleasant house and garden on Wyoming Avenue. It would be hard to leave Washington; but they left, and Minister Carr did an admirable job at Prague, until the Wehrmacht arrived in March 1939. He came home then, and died three years later.

And that is the end of my account of this unique trio to whom we and our country owe so much. Thank you for listening.