



# World Bank Group Archives Exhibit Series

In Memoriam: Edward Donovan

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The World Bank Group Archives Exhibit Series contains exhibits originally published on the Archives' external website beginning in 2002. When the Archives' website was transferred to a new platform in 2015, it was decided that older exhibits would be converted to pdf format and made available as a series on the World Bank's external database, [Documents & Reports](#).

These exhibits, authored by World Bank archivists, highlight key events, personalities, and publications in the history of the World Bank. They also bring attention to some of the more fascinating archival records contained in the Archives' holdings.

To view current exhibits, visit the [Exhibits](#) page on the Archives' website.



## **In Memoriam: Edward Donovan**

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One of the Bank's original employees, Edward J. "Eddie" Donovan, passed away on January 14, 2003. He joined the Bank on May 22, 1946, more than a month before it officially opened for business on June 25, 1946.

In an interview in the June 1976 issue of Bank Notes, Donovan said that he heard about the Bank through the father of a friend. He applied, and was assigned to Office Services (he later became Chief of the Office Services Division). He was on probation for five weeks, and then stayed until 1978, when he retired.

In a special supplement to The Bank's World celebrating the Bank's 40th anniversary Donovan remembered that H Street was a noisy place in 1946. Trolley cars still ran along 18th and 19th streets and on Pennsylvania Avenue. The building at 1818 H Street (which eventually became known as the A building) and the Hurley-Wright Building (later acquired by the Bank to become the B building) were the only office buildings in the area. The Bank's first offices were at 1818 H Street, which had originally been constructed in 1941 to house the U.S. Surgeon General. In 1946 it housed offices of the U.S. State Department.

The Bank occupied the tenth floor, and the International Monetary Fund occupied the ninth. The rooms were large but bare, and it took time before Donovan and his colleagues in Office Services could obtain furniture and other necessary supplies. Their task was made more difficult by the fact that wartime shortages had not been entirely made up.

Between Bank offices at 1818 H Street and the Hurley-Wright Building was a brownstone housing the offices of the Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind. The rest of the neighborhood consisted of the Roger Smith Hotel at 18th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, private townhouses, apartment buildings, and at the northwest corner of today's Main Complex (later the site of the old F building), a firehouse used as the meeting place of the Association of the Oldest Inhabitants of the District of Columbia. Once a year, the Oldest Inhabitants would pull an antique fire wagon—meant to be pulled by men, not horses—around the park.



*Ed Donovan, 1986*



The Bank was small then and everyone knew each other. The Bank began operating with 1 president, a staff of 71, 19 Executive Directors and their alternates (excluding 5 vacancies) and 38 member countries. "It was like a family," Donovan said in the 1976 article. "When the first Christmas party was held at the Roger Smith Hotel, there were only 30 people."



*Largest Bank family: Mr and Mrs. Edward Donovan and their seven children (March 1959)*

Economic life was different then, too. In the mid-1940s a Bank staff member could live comfortably in Washington on \$45 per week. Dinners cost about eleven dollars, and cigarettes cost eighteen cents per pack. Automobiles were available, but were expensive to maintain.

By September 1946 the Bank had begun to take over more space at 1818 H Street, and Donovan occupied an office on the second floor. He was Assistant to Mr. William E. McCorkle, Chief of Office Services. The Bank's Administrative Order No. 1, issued September 5, 1946, assigned a broad range of functions and responsibilities to Office Services. These included payroll and general clerical, travel and transportation, property and supply, printing and drafting, messenger service, and telephone operators.

Despite this organizational progress, "The first year was very uncertain," Donovan recalled. By the end of September 1946 only two member countries had asked for loans, and these were only requests or inquiries, not adequately documented loan applications. "Mr. [Eugene] Meyer [the Bank's first President] left in December... Then Mr. [Harold] Smith, the Vice President, died, and things seemed to be going downhill in a hurry. "

But the atmosphere in the Bank improved when Mr. John J. McCloy, Meyer's eventual successor, arrived. "There was a tremendous camaraderie. Everyone pulled together and got things done," said Donovan.

"We were all on a first-name basis, and I especially remember our Christmas parties-- which the staff paid for. Professor [Kyriakos] Varvaressos, the Executive



*Ed Donovan (left) at the 1954 World Bank Christmas Cocktail Party*



Director from Greece, was a wonderful man, and would entertain us by playing the piano and singing carols...

"At the annual picnic, Mr. McCloy and Mr. [Eugene] Black [U.S. Executive Director and later Bank President] would choose the baseball teams. They were both very interested in the staff, and it was quite something to hear the bantering going on between the two of them..."



and over again, for the name The World Bank, though it occasionally appeared in the press, hadn't come into general use yet."

*Bank staff members celebrating five years of service in this 1951 photograph. Donovan is second from the right in the back row*

"The word around town was that the Bank would pay tax-free salaries," noted Donovan. "That set the phones ringing all day and the secretaries who answered them got tongue-tied saying International Bank for Reconstruction and Development over and over again, for the name The World Bank, though it occasionally appeared in the press, hadn't come into general use yet."

Donovan was also a bowler of some renown. As the April 1, 1951 issue of International Bank Notes records,

"The Bank Bowling League was simply 'bowled over' by the record-breaking bowling displayed by Edward J. Donovan." He broke the record of high game and individual high set, the latter being the highest ever bowled in the Bank League.

Perhaps the most complex and massive job supervised by Donovan during his years as Chief of the Office Services Division was the office moves accompanying the 1972 reorganization of the Bank. As noted in the October 1972 issue of Bank Notes, while the staff of the Bank vacated the premises from the close of business on Friday, October 6 and stayed away until Tuesday, October 10 (the Columbus day holiday was celebrated on Monday, October 9), Mr. Donovan's crew of 105 men moved 15,000 items including furniture, cartons, file cabinets, pictures, office machines, etc. from 1,000 offices and 500 secretarial areas used by 1,400 staff on 35 floors in 7 buildings to somewhere else. With time out for two nights' sleep, the team did this in just 26 hours working time, beginning 6 p.m. Friday and finishing late Sunday afternoon.



The job was completed 14 hours under the estimated time with no injuries and no arguments. Part of the crew "warmed up" by moving another 100 staff members earlier in the week.

Said Donovan, "Everyone went home grinning Sunday evening, proud of their accomplishment. I was more proud of them than they were of themselves."

Eddie Donovan was a very popular, well-liked member of the Bank's staff, and provided a living link to its early days. He will be missed.