The Bancroft Library University of California/Berkeley
Regional Oral History Office

Julian Bagley

WELCOME TO THE SAN FRANCISCO OPERA HOUSE

An Interview Conducted by
Suzanne Riess

Copy No. ___

Julian Bagley

Photograph by Cecil J. Thompson

Julian Bagley

Photograph by Cecil J. Thompson

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The Regional Oral History Office was established to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons who have contributed significantly to the development of the West. The Office is under the administrative supervision of Professor James D. Hart, the Director of The Bancroft Library.

Willa K. Baum
Department Head
Regional Oral History Office

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University of California at Berkeley

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Recording the memoirs of Julian Bagley was a project suggested to the Regional Oral History Office in the early months of 1972. Because Mr. Bagley's health was uncertain, and urgency was a keynote in arrangements for the interviewing, the Oral History Office, with the backing of the San Francisco Opera Guild, agreed to interview Mr. Bagley as soon as he was well enough to participate in the interviews and to enjoy the chance to reminisce about the notables he had come to know through his position at the San Francisco Opera House.

Never easily put into one word, Julian Bagley's position--concierge, tour conductor, welcomer--put him at the front door, as well as behind the scenes, for forty years of performances, visits, and meetings, at the San Francisco Opera House. And, as well as being a treasurehouse of memoirs himself, he was guardian of the Signature Book, a handsomely-bound, historically-significant document, rich with signatures, the apple of any autograph-collector's eye--as illustrated in part in this manuscript. An index simultaneously prepared by Mr. Bagley through the years makes the book doubly useful, and one of the goals of the interview was to flesh out the people recorded there.

With the Signature Book as a starting-point, and a great interest in Mr. Bagley's own views of his life and how he realized his aspirations, the interviews were planned. However, not until July 1972, a delay of several months after the initial impetus to interview, which was necessitated because of a setback in the interviewee's health, did the interviews actually begin. The location was Franklin Hospital in San Francisco. Julian--in the informal setting of the hospital, first names came easily--was recovering, and relatively mobile in a wheelchair which allowed him to put his hand on a picture or a letter or to point out something that might be referred to in the interviews.

After the interviews were transcribed and edited by the interviewer, Julian, now well-recovered and comfortably at home, was able to check the manuscript and edit further in February 1973. To see Julian again, this time surrounded by familiar pictures, souvenirs, and paintings at 123 Bernard Street gave new meaning to the enthusiasm that comes through in the manuscript as Julian talks about his joy in the arts of ballet and opera, and his favorite stars. This is an unusual man. He carved out a work in life that was entirely agreeable and satisfying to him,

and which brought a special personal warmth to those he dealt with.

Of course Julian Bagley is not known only in his relation to the notables and as the custodian of the Signature Book. Appended clippings show the author, known to readers young and old, of the stories of "Bodidalee." To his friends he was a privotal figure, making introductions among them that brought together a fortunate mingling. Julian's 80th birthday was celebrated with flourishes by these friends. Appended is the program which indicates a splendid event.

Other friends of Julian Bagley's had other stories to tell, and the Oral History Office received many helpful suggestions in regard to the interviews. Indeed, as well as listing the donors to the project, we wish to acknowledge the help of Cecil Thompson, photographer, and Barbara Ehernberger, another faithful friend of Julian's, and mainstay during his recent illnesses. We are also grateful for the consistent cooperation of Mr. Don Michalske, Executive Secretary, Board of Trustees, of the War Memorial Opera House.

Suzanne B. Riess, Interviewer
The Regional Oral History Office

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Foreword

Julian Bagley is a connoisseur of opera houses and of the black man's folk tales. This may seem an unlikely combination, but it is a thoroughly authentic one because Julian Bagley is a thoroughly authentic personality. He appears, of course, between the covers of this book in the second of the two connoisseurships just mentioned. In the first, he is celebrated throughout the entire musical world, especially on the Pacific Coast.

Mr. Bagley has not missed a single performance at the War Memorial Opera House in San Francisco since it was opened in the fall of 1932. His official title there, although it is little known and fits badly with the West Coast milieu, is concierge; his principal activity is conducting tours. People come to the War Memorial Opera House at all hours and want to be shown around. It is a famous place. The international conference that established the United Nations was held there; most of the mid-century's stars in opera, concert, symphony, and ballet have performed there, and something of their luster has mellowed its red plush seats and rubbed off on its travertine and gilt. The Opera House is a sight for West Coast tourists, and it has been carefully studied by numerous architects who have built similar theaters since 1932. It was necessary for someone to be there to do the honors. Julian Bagley saw the necessity for that someone even before the house was completed, and he convinced the trustees that he was the man for the job.

Over the years his function has expanded. It is typical of him that he had to make an appointment with the writer of these lines very late one afternoon, well after a symphony concert was over, because, he said, there were certain old ladies who depended on him alone to assist them

into their cars. All the performers know him, of course, and his post-performance parties are legendary.

During those weeks when the War Memorial is dark or pre-empted by opera rehearsals, he sets out on pilgrimages to investigate opera houses elsewhere. There are few that he does not know, whether in the United States, Canada, or Europe. He has made three forays across the Atlantic on his quest, and now he is poised for his first invasion of Russia.

What has all this to do with the black man's folk tales? Nothing and everything. It is all part of a very rich personality, to whom music and the theater are essential, who knows the Louvre as well as he knows the Opéra, and who was a friend and fellow worker of such as Countee Cullen, James Weldon Johnson, and other writers involved in what used to be called the Negro Renaissance. *Candle-Lighting Time in Bodidalee* (accent on the "did") is by no means his first published effort, although it is his first book.

These are folk tales that Mr. Bagley heard as a child in and around the town of St. Nicholas, Florida, which is now a part of Jacksonville. His father was a shipyard worker, and he too worked in the shipyards for a time. He then went to Hampton Institute in Virginia for his education, graduated as an agriculturalist, and spent four years—1919 to 1922—as a district farm demonstration agent employed by the Department of Agriculture. His job was to help black farmers in Virginia to improve their methods, and in the process he swapped stories with them. He heard many of the tales of Bodidalee in Virginia, too; but the Virginia versions, he says, were tougher, more violent, and more in the tradition of the slave revolts that had racked that part of the world than in the easygoing tradition of Florida. Nevertheless, hearing the Virginia versions helped fix the stories in his mind, and he has been turning them all over in thought ever since. The tales in his book, it will be seen, grow more complex and interlocked as the book proceeds, and that is his contribution to them.

Mr. Bagley went to San Francisco in 1922, managed a hotel there for ten years—and the rest is Opera House history. Now he makes literary and folkloristic history as well. The author of this book has never been seen in the War Memorial without a red carnation in the buttonhole of his dark, discreet, and beautifully tailored coat. Much the same thing is to be said, metaphorically, of *Candle-Lighting Time in Bodidalee.*

Alfred V. Frankenstein

[Interview #1, July 11, 1972]

Some Early Successes of the Author of Bodidalee

Riess: Before we get to your work at the opera house, I'd like to hear about your own history. You were born in 1892.

Bagley: Yes, in Florida.

Riess: And what was your family doing in Florida?

Bagley: They were shipyard workers. My father was a shipyard worker, and like so many jobs that you fall into, you fall into it through your family, one way or another. So, I worked in the shipyard until I was ready to go to Hampton Institute for an education. I had gone to school in Jacksonville, Florida and I had learned arithmetic and simpler things, and then I went to Hampton Institute in Virginia and had a regular, normal course there.

Riess: How far back has your family been in Florida?

Bagley: In Florida, all the way back.

Riess: As far back as you can remember?

Bagley: Yes, yes. I can remember my grandfather there. You see, that was not too long after slavery, and all the people who had been slaves settled. They didn't go far like the people now. People now think nothing of going a long distance. I, for example, have been to France, Italy, and the town that Mozart had so much success with, Prague (that's in Czechoslovakia). And I've been to Spain, Madrid, and Greece, Athens and

Bagley: Piraeus. And I've been to Turkey and I've been to London, all those places.

Riess: When you were a little boy in Florida, had you any ideas of what you wanted to be?

Bagley: No, I had no ideas at all about going to all those places.

Riess: What did you think about being? When you can remember wanting to be something, what did you want to be?

Gabley: Well, I think that for a long time I wanted to be a writer. I started out writing poems when I was a very little boy and then I discovered that poetry didn't pay too much. So, I launched into writing stories. And my recent book has eighteen stories in it. It's published by American Heritage. It's a very well done book from the point of view of the artist. The artist, Wallace Tripp, did beautiful work. He's made lots of pictures for it and it's selling very well.

It was in eighteen stores here in San Francisco and it sold out in all of them except one. I think that Books Incorporated is the only store that has them now. It's done very well and it's gotten excellent reviews. The New Yorker magazine of, I think, the tenth of January or the tenth of December, it must have been because it was before Christmas, called it "one of the great treats of the year." I was so happy about that.

Riess: It's called Bodidalee?

Bagley: A Candle Lighting Time in Bodidalee. Bodidalee, as you know, is a folk name of a place. Someone says, "Where are you going tonight?" and you say, "I'm going to Bodidalee." That means that the person doesn't want to tell you exactly where he's going. And they make up songs. They've made up songs about Bodidalee, and it's quite a fascinating word that you can turn around to your own satisfaction.

In the book, for instance, there's one place where the child asks, "Where's Bodidalee, Tell me dear--Is it far or is it near?" And the other

Bagley: child answers, "Bodidalee big? Bodidalee small? Bodidalee just a name to call! Where's Bodidalee? Listen, dear, Bodidalee's here, Bodidalee's there -- Bodidalee's almost everywhere!" It makes quite a delightful rhyme. Children used that when we were little. We used to play around with it all the time.

Riess: Was your mother or your father a good story teller?

Bagley: No, neither one was particularly a good story teller. They liked a good story, but they didn't tell them.

Riess: Where do you think that you got this tradition of the stories?

Bagley: I don't know. I liked, as I said, to write poetry. Most children like poetry very much. I know that one of the boys who works here [Franklin Hospital] is contemplating a story career as soon as he gets-- well, now he has gone into writing poetry. There's not very much money in poetry, but stories are much easier to make money out of. I know on my book that they gave me for the first royalty $2,500, and that's a lot of money compared to a poet. And then they pay me, every quarter or so, they pay me a dividend.

Riess: Was the book advertised for children, or for what age group?

Bagley: It was advertised in some places for a group from eight on and others didn't mention it. It was published by such a good publisher; that American Heritage is really something. They don't spare any pains or money to get you presented in the best possible way, and that's what they did for me. It's illustrated, and the illustrations are simply delightful, they're fantastic. Actually, I think that the illustrations make the book. It's very good.

Riess: How did they find you and how did you find them?

Bagley: Oh, I found them just through the advertisements. I just sent it on a chance that it would be accepted, and the editor of the book sent me a telegram on New Year's Eve day. Usually, in the experience I've had with the people who've accepted things of mine, they've accepted them after a long wait and they've

Bagley: accepted them by a very cautious letter, but this was a telegram and it came on New Year's Eve day and it said, "Congratulations on your wonderful story! We would like to publish it." And then we went into more details by letter and they finally sent me two installments of payments for the first royalty money. Twelve hundred and fifty dollars the first time and $1,250 the second time, very soon thereafter. And it seemed like a lot of money to me.

Riess: I would think so, yes. That's real enthusiasm.

Bagley: Yes, well, they're very careful and very cautious, those publishers. They know what the public wants and they know what the public will buy and make it possible for them to publish a thing like that. Why, a thing like that must have cost them a lot of money with all those illustrations. They gave the illustrator over $2,000 to illustrate it, you know.

Riess: Did you meet the illustrator?

Bagley: No, I didn't. He lives in New Hampshire and I never met him. He was selected by the publishers and everything that he did was sent to me for my approval. As soon as I approved it, it went on. I was in Vienna when they sent the last, that one that's on the cover. You've seen it? They sent that to me in Vienna, and asked for a cablegram whether I approved it or not. I approved it, of course, and there wasn't very much for me to say. I made it as short as possible because the more you said, the more it cost. It cost me, I think, about ten dollars to send that cablegram.

Riess: I think it is interesting that you had all these stories. I'm just trying to picture if there was a grandfather who would tell the stories or whether...

Bagley: Well, it was more or less younger people; people who certainly had experience with slavery and experience with Africa told the stories, you know. And they were very easy to pick up because they were interesting stories and you felt that you were right there when they were being told. That made it nice.

Riess: In the home that you grew up in, was there much reading or music or interest in that sort of thing?

Bagley: They read a good bit. Uncle Tom's Cabin and things like that they read, and they played the piano, some of them, jazz music of course (what's now known as jazz). In those days, it was called ragtime, not jazz. They played the organ or the piano, very nice.

Riess: Did you have brothers and sisters?

Bagley: Yes, I had brothers and sisters. My sister came out to see me while I was sick, and also my nephew came to see me. And all of my affairs were being taken care of by a very good friend of mine, Barbara Ehernberger. Her husband is a marvelous architect and a marvelous man. The whole family is just as nice as they can be. The history of the family goes way back. Their great-grandfather founded a bank in Nebraska and he is still very active. He sent me a history of himself when he was down here at Christmas time. He came down at Christmas and he brought me a lot of nice things to eat and it was a very, very pleasant visit.

Riess: Did your parents have ideas about what they wanted you to be?

Bagley: No, they didn't. They just let us go. Anything that we wanted to do that was honorable, they agreed with us. The parents have seen stories that I have written more recently, but they didn't see anything in the old days.

I wrote a good many stories for the magazines, for the Outlook. New York Outlook was a very wonderful magazine. It's no longer published, but they published poetry and stories and good essays in the old days. And I wrote a very nice story for the Outlook. It was called "The Unlettered Day." I just got that from a man who was in the army, and he saw a lot of people who couldn't write and he said, "Oh, it's a great pity to see so many unlettered people!" And I just decided that that was a good title for a story and I used it. I sent it to Outlook and they paid me a very good sum. It was read all over the country and I got letters from people even in Europe who had read it, you know. And that was the story.

Bagley: I won the first prize in the essay section in Opportunity magazine. Opportunity magazine is no longer published, but that was a Negro journal that published all the best of the writings of the Negroes, and they published my story. It won the first prize in the essay section.

Riess: Outlook wasn't a specifically Negro magazine?

Gabley: No, Outlook was just a world magazine.

Riess: The fan mail must be gratifying. Have you gotten into correspondences with people who have enjoyed your things over the past?

Bagley: Well, I've got letters from people all over the country, including Florida, about my stories. And in Vienna, they were very enthusiastic about the illustration and the story [Bodidalee] there. They were just thrilled with that and they helped me to get the answer to the editor of American Heritage in shape so that it would be as short as possible. Even so, it cost me over ten dollars.

Riess: When you were little, what kind of things did you like to read best? What magazines and things?

Bagley: Well, I liked very much the magazines that had children's stories in them, you know? General children's stories.

Riess: Can you remember the names of any of the magazines that you might have been seeing then?

Bagley: Well, there was one magazine called St. Nicholas. That was a children's magazine. I got a great deal of pleasure out of that because it had some very good stories in it and they weren't stories that were in a certain trend. Anybody who had a good story could sell it to St. Nicholas. It was a very good magazine. I liked it very much.

Riess: Did any of your high school teachers encourage you in writing or do you remember any special people who did?

Bagley: Well, at Hampton there was a teacher named Mary W.

Gabley: Nettleton. She was magnificent in encouraging you on things and I think that she was on the judging committee at Hampton for prize competition. Hampton had a lot of contests there, you know, for stories, and I won first prize in one of those contests. Then the story was published in what is known as the Southern Workman.* The Southern Workman was a very unusual magazine in that it published essays and stories and poems and a variety of things. It was easier to get into than most of the magazines that specialized in things.

A Young Agricultural Agent and His Later Travels

Riess: Was Hampton Institute a liberal arts place, or was it a more technical education?

Bagley: It was more technical. Hampton Institute in the old days trained people in agriculture, carpentry and in various other kinds of trades. That made it rather low academically. They didn't go in for Bachelor of Arts in those days or Bachelor of Science as they do now. They have a very fine school of architecture there now, but they didn't have at that time. Everything was industrial--agriculture, carpentry, machinists. They trained all the students there, and some of them got very good jobs.

Riess: What were you enrolled as?

Bagley: I was just enrolled as an academic student. I got a diploma there that didn't specify any special thing.

Riess: But you weren't studying carpentry or...?

Bagley: No, I wasn't. I was studying agriculture. It was very good. They had a good agricultural farm there and a person really had a chance to experiment with what they had taught him there. That made it very

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*Published 1872 to 1939 by the Hampton Institute.

Bagley: interesting. It is so interesting working on the outside and seeing the results of your work--peaches and pears and plums and various other kinds of vegetables.

Riess: Did you get a chance to follow up on that interest in agriculture?

Bagley: I was appointed as what they call an agricultural agent and I had a certain number of counties in Virginia that I went to and I supervised the agent in that particular county. They took my advice on things that they should do. That was very interesting. I got some good stories out of that. They would sit at night and talk to me and I got some material that way.

I'm always on the look-out for story material. I like to find new areas to explore in the way of stories, and it's very interesting. You can do a lot. I kept a diary of my travels in Spain. I've been to Madrid and to Toledo and to the places in Europe that I mentioned before as well as Turkey and Istanbul. As I mentioned, I've been to Prague, where Mozart worked so much with his music. It was for that reason that I wanted to see it.

I've also been to Leningrad. I went there to see the great Hermitage Museum. I was in Russia seven days, and I went to the Hermitage every day by myself, except for the last day when I went with a touring group and a guide, of course. The guide said that the Hermitage Museum was so large that if you stood in front of each picture in the museum for one minute, it would take you nineteen years to go through it.

Riess: How did you decide what you wanted to see?

Bagley: Well, I didn't decide. I just rambled around in the museum. When the guide took us, we went on a very definite and shortened tour and he had special pictures that he wanted to see. But, I didn't have that in mind when I went there. I just went into the museum and wandered around. You have to pay when you aren't with a guide. When you're with a guide, you pay the guide a certain amount for the tour. Then, he takes

Bagley: you there and you go in free. So, that was the way that I saw it seven different times.

It is one of the most fascinating museums that I have ever seen. To me, it makes the Louvre look sick. The Louvre is kind of dirty in various parts, but in the Hermitage the walls are clean and as fresh as the walls are in here. The light is very good too. The Louvre is way in the midst of Paris, and you don't get much light there. But in the Hermitage you get wonderful light. It's right on the river and it's as clear as day. It's very nice.

Riess: When was this trip?

Bagley: I went every year for three years straight. The only reason that I didn't go this year was because I got hurt. Otherwise, I would be in Denmark now. I was going to Denmark, Norway and Sweden this year, to the Scandinavian countries. I have a very good friend in Copenhagen. I showed her through the opera house when she was here and she wanted me to come and see their opera house and to be her guest in Copenhagen this year. And I was going there first--from San Francisco to Copenhagen and then on to the principal cities of Sweden and Norway.

The opera house has brought me in contact with a lot of very friendly people, and they have more or less guided me in the direction that I have taken.

Riess: I was thinking that, in addition to knowing how to get around, you must be a very good listener to absorb all the stories.

Bagley: Yes, I am a very good listener. I just let them go! It was fascinating to hear those old stories because you get a lot from the expressions on the faces of the people. They made all sorts of illustrations like "boom boom bah" [hands illustrating] and so forth. They went right along that way. Those were not in the stories that you told because it would take too much time to describe those things, but with all the help [of the illustrations] they would make the stories very vivid to us.

Riess: When you were a county agricultural agent, were you working mostly with tenant farmers.

Bagley: They were relatively well-placed farmers who either owned or were in the process of buying their homes. That was long before the great boom in land and houses. Everything was comparatively cheap and they paid for their farms after a long period. In the meantime, they were working and selling stuff to the various markets.

Riess: In what year would this have been?

Bagley: That was after the first world war, because they sent me a telegram asking me to accept the job.

Riess: Were you in the war?

Bagley: Yes, I was in the first world war. I didn't go overseas, though; I stayed in this country. That made it much easier to keep in contact with them. Hampton Institute was engineering the placement of its students at that time, and I was placed as what they called a district farm agent. You had a certain district. I had five or six counties in Virginia to supervise.

Riess: What did you do during the war?

Bagley: I was in the war as an average soldier. I was a first sergeant and that meant I had various duties to do. Sometimes I'd drill the men and sometimes I did various other things that were worthwhile. It was a fascinating experience.

Riess: So, you were getting ready to go overseas, but the war ended?

Bagley: Yes, the war ended overnight. The next morning we woke up and people said that we didn't have to go anyplace and that we shouldn't be afraid. I'm not too sure that I would have enjoyed going overseas because the opportunities for seeing the various parts of the places where we were were too restricted. I don't like tours for that very reason. They restrict you too much. You can wander any place you want to if you're not on a special tour, but on a special tour they've got everything organized so that you have to go where they say. Then, you don't always see the things that you want to see.

Riess: Well, the army certainly has things organized! I think that you're well off not going overseas in World War I. And you didn't get into the flu epidemic either, I guess.

Bagley: No, I didn't get the flu. People who I had known for years were dead when I got back. They had died in the great flu epidemic.

Riess: So, you had the job then as soon as the war ended. How long did you keep on as an agricultural agent?

Bagley: Yes, they telegrammed me to give me this job while I was in the army and that was in 1918. That was very good to have a job waiting for you when you came out because that gave you a chance to go straight ahead without any hindrance.

Riess: When you were going on with your job, were you also writing stories down as you heard them?

Bagley: Yes. I wrote stories at Hampton for the Outlook. Then the Opportunity magazine had a contest for Negro writers all over the world and I won the first prize in that contest. I was very interested in writing that because they were giving a big dinner in a big restaurant in New York just across from the Grand Central and that made me very enthusiastic about trying to write something that would measure up to their idea of a good essay.

By the way, it was about a little bookstore here in San Francisco. The scene was laid in a little bookstore on Sixth Street near Mission. The story was called "Moving Pictures in an Old Song Shop." I picked up these various old songs and looked at them and they brought back some experiences that I had had earlier and [the story] went right straight along.

Julian Bagley Arrives in San Francisco and Determines to Work at the Opera House

Riess: When did you come to San Francisco?

Bagley: It seems to me that I came to San Francisco in 1922. I worked at the opera house for forty years, and I was here ten years before I went to the opera house.

Riess: So that would have been 1932 when you started at the opera house?

Bagley: Yes, that's about right.

Riess: You had the farm agent job and then how did you decide to come to San Francisco? And how did you get here? And how did you finance yourself?

Bagley: Well, they decided that they wanted to transfer me. In the government jobs everywhere there was always a shifting of people. They wanted to shift me to Texas and I didn't want to go to Texas because that was too far from a center of culture. So I decided that I would come to San Francisco. I had read in Jack London's biography about how he had worked in San Francisco and about what a fine town it was for working on story ideas and that's how I came to San Francisco. I think that's a good reason.

Riess: Did you have a farm agent job here when you came?

Bagley: No, I didn't have a farm agent job. I was the manager of a small hotel down near the waterfront and I had a good time there because the men trusted me. There were mostly men in that hotel and they trusted me. They left money with me when they were going to sea and all sorts of things, other personal things. And they had great faith in me and that news spread around the waterfront and I got some very good customers that way. It was another man who owned the hotel; I was just working for him. I had a good time then.

And it was just a little after that that the opera house started to come into being. It was built about that time. Before it was built I went to the opera performances at the Civic Auditorium and at Dreamland Auditorium.

Riess: Well, it was completed in 1932.

Bagley: Yes, it was ten years in the building. I got ready for it and I said to friends of mine that I was going to get a job in the opera house and they said, "Opera house!" They thought that I was absolutely crazy.

I went to see the man who was the manager of the opera house and he said, "Well, you can try it if you want to. It's going to be very difficult to do it the way you want to do it."

I had an idea that I would work at performances and then, in the day time, I would take visitors from all over the world through the opera house. And that's what I did and that's where I made so many friends. I've taken some wonderful people through the opera house and I've talked with them. H. G. Wells, who won the Nobel Prize for literature, was one man. The other one who won the Nobel Prize for literature [1928] and who came to the opera house was Sigrid Undset, a Norwegian woman.

Riess: So, you really designed that job for yourself.

Bagley: Yes, I did. It's always been run just the way that I wanted it run. And the people have been very patient and very good to me all these years. They have let me do it just the way I wanted to do it. It is a very interesting place to work if you do the job right. All the historical business that they have is well worth consideration.

Riess: Was music a special interest of yours by this time also?

Bagley: Yes. By this time music was a special interest of mine. I had played the trombone in the Hampton Institute band and that gave me a special interest in music. Of course, that music that we played in the band was very light music, composed more or less for marching. But it was interesting enough. And here at the opera house I got to know all of the famous composers--Rachmaninoff, Gershwin and some of the others that I knew. I had a good time talking to them.

Riess: In 1922 they started to plan for this opera house. Who were some of the people who were behind this?

Bagley: Well, of course, it was a city project, and they got as much money from the city as they could. Rich people gave them a good bit, but most of it came from the city because it is, as you know, a city-owned and a city-operated place. All of the employees of the opera house are paid by the city.

Riess: I know. I sometimes get confused about this. The opera house is like a big organization and then the opera performs there and the symphony performs there and all of the other people perform there. How does this work?

Bagley: Well, they have special concerts that come there. They are brought in by special agents who live in the city and make it a part of their regular business to bring these people. We've had such things as the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo in the old days and now Margot Fonteyn with the English Ballet. We have concert managers who bring special people in there who have exclusive drawing power. I mean, they draw practically all the people in the town. And that helps them to make good money off of them. I think that there was an article in this past Sunday's Chronicle that told about one of the concert impresarios here who brought different attractions to San Francisco.

Riess: Somebody like Sol Hurok?

Bagley: Yes, well Sol Hurok is a general agent for the whole country and he has various agents in certain cities who bring in his attractions.

The People of San Francisco Have an Opera House, 1932!

Riess: When the opera house was conceived of, how did the veterans' auditorium fit in?

Bagley: Well, I'll tell you more or less. It was a city project and the city was paying for these two big buildings, for this big building. The veterans got in on it and got their building at the same time. They've got good facilities there for meeting

Bagley: rooms and there's a nice museum there and there's a small theatre on the ground floor. And all of those things helped to satisfy the veterans. The opera people went ahead with their building and got it finished beforehand. The opera house was finished in October 1932 and the veterans' building was finished sometime later in February.

Riess: You do have a memory for this!

Bagley: Well, some things I'm sure about and some things just get away from me having so many other things come after.

Riess: What was the feeling of the people of San Francisco about the opera house? Do you think that there was a lot of general interest in it?

Bagley: Well, I think that there was specific interest. The rich people gave money and, in a great many cases, helped out on the project. That made them have a special interest and even until today they come to the meetings that they have for the opera association and for the symphony association. They have meetings every year to raise money because that is a very expensive project, as you probably know. The opera house costs a lot of money to rent and it costs a lot of money to keep it up. As you know, it has to be kept up. And the two [expenses] mean that they have to make enough money to make ends meet by getting enough money from the tenants to go on in that way.

Riess: How about the not-rich people? How much do you think that the opera house appeals to them?

Bagley: Well, I think that it appeals a great deal to the people who like music, the kind of music that's brought there. And they do a lot by buying tickets for the performances that they have there. I think that that's one of the reasons why it's there, to draw good crowds, and every performance that they have is very worthwhile. I've seen opera performances in all of the various European cities, and I think that the way they do things here is comparable to any place in Europe.

For instance, I saw the ballet that was here the other day, the Vienna Ballet with Margot Fonteyn,

Bagley: in Vienna. It was very well done. I saw some other things at the Vienna opera house that were not so good. I saw a performance of "Carmen" there which was excellent. On the other hand, I saw one of "Don Giovanni" which was not so good, in my opinion, compared with the way we did it when we gave "Don Giovanni" here.

The ballet was excellent there. I saw the newspaper review and they said that the ballet, except for Fonteyn, which came from Vienna, wasn't so good. But I saw it in Vienna, on home ground, and it was very good there. They had good dancers and good scenery.

The things start in Vienna much earlier than they start here, and I guess you're on the street about ten o'clock at night.

Riess: That's right. And then you'd go to a cafe. In Vienna they use their opera house constantly. And the business of bringing all the sets in and then taking them all away--

Bagley: Yes, every night they would take the sets out. They'd use big trucks. Did you get a chance to go to that famous restaurant right across the street from the opera house, Sacher's? They have the best tortes and coffee there. The coffee there is simply magnificent! It's very good and well worthwhile.

They don't seem to hurry you at all. Everybody there is so kind and gentle to you; I think that the people in Vienna are the kindest people in the world. They even out-do Czechoslovakia, which has very, very friendly people. The little theater that Mozart played in in Prague is called the National Theater. It has very fine equipment and fine performances. It is a very small theater and it's easy to fill it.

Did you go to the theater across town in Vienna, the one that plays the lighter things? [Stadtsoper] "Porgy and Bess" played there for a long time. That's a nice theater. I saw "Die Freischutz" there and that's a very good play. It's a very beautiful house.

Riess: Part of the question, which I didn't really ask

Riess: you exactly, was how much effort you thought that the opera association here, or the opera house, had put into making people more aware of music and more interested?

Bagley: Well, I think that the opera company has done everything to get people interested.

Riess: How would you explain that Europeans, especially Italians and Germans, know opera so much better than people in this country?

Bagley: Well, of course, prices are so small there compared with ours here. I think that you get people [there] going to the opera early in life and that helps to bring them along with an opera tradition. For example, when I saw the first-night performance of "Don Giovanni" in Vienna, it only cost 60¢ for standing room. Our standing room here, for a first night, costs $5.00. That's a lot of money, you know. It's so different from over in Europe.

Riess: So, while the opera house was being built, did you keep on with your job as the manager of the hotel while you were waiting?

Bagley: Yes, I kept on with that job. That was a fascinating job. It was very limited in its appeal, compared with the opera house, and that's why I left to go to the opera house because I saw the opportunity for branching out and doing more.

Riess: Who were some of the people associated with the early development of the opera house?

Bagley: Selby C. Oppenheimer was the manager for the city. He wasn't the manager for the opera company. The manager for the opera in the old days was Peter Conley, a very wonderful man.

Riess: And who did you get in touch with to get your job?

Bagley: Selby C. Oppenheimer, because I worked for the city, not for the opera company. The city was under Selby C. Oppenheimer, and he gave me the job. Then I got very friendly with the opera people. I did a lot of

Bagley: things for them and they began to recognize me.

Riess: As a story teller, if you were to describe yourself coming and looking for this job from Mr. Oppenheimer, how would you describe this young man?

Bagley: Well, he was well-dressed, in the opera tradition I would say. He was then in his twenties and I think that he was quite appealing to Oppenheimer because he knew that I knew something about music.

Riess: Do you think you were shy, or self-confident?

Bagley: Pretty confident, because I knew music. I talked with him and he found out that I was the person for the job. He gave me the job and, as I said, jobs were very scarce in those days. The wages were very slight. But they saw the possibilities that I told them that I wanted to develop in the travel business. They were very kind to me and we have gotten some people there from all over the world.

The secretary of the royal opera house in Copenhagen was there one year during the opera season. She wanted to study and to see what they were doing in the way of opera. She was willing to stand, so I got her standing room for the first few nights. Then Mrs. Alma de Bretteville Spreckels gave me some tickets for her box and I then gave them to this woman from the royal opera house in Copenhagen and she sat with Mrs. Spreckels. And, of course, knowing so much about the history of opera houses and scenery and so forth, Mrs. Spreckels found her a fascinating woman. That brought me up a little bit in the estimation of Mrs. Spreckels.

Quite a number of people used to give me tickets to give them to somebody who would appreciate them. I'd pick out a serviceman in a great many cases, and in this case the secretary of the royal opera house was there and I picked her out.

Riess: Well, people relied on your judgement in lots of matters.

Bagley: Yes. In most cases, I had a chance to talk to people and to find out some of the things that they liked and some of the things that they were going to do. That

Bagley: was very helpful. Here's a nice incident about Dame Myra Hess. She's dead now, but even if she were alive, I would tell this. I was in her dressing room because she wanted to see me about something. She pulled out a pack of cigarettes and thrust one into my hand. I walked out, and outside the stagehand said, "Look! Look! Look!" because I don't smoke at all. They were just thrilled to see me with that cigarette, thinking that I was going to start smoking. But I didn't smoke that cigarette. I carried it off somewhere and put it away. Then I went back to Dame Myra Hess--I don't know, I was helping her with some problem then--and the men tease me to this day about smoking the cigarette from Dame Myra Hess. It was a lot of fun.

[Interview #2, July 14, 1972]

The beginning of the tours and the signature book, to 1943; opera house facts; Pierre Monteux; getting the public there; "booing"; Marian Anderson; Moiseyev Dancers; President Eisenhower; autograph-seekers; pickets; little dinners

Riess: We spoke last week about your background. Now we can go into the beginning of your association with the opera house. Did you go to the operas or keep in touch in the ten-year period from 1922 to 1932 before you began to work at the opera house?

Bagley: Well, I had seen occasional operas in other places, but we didn't have any opera at the opera house until 1932. The first one was "Tosca" with Claudia Muzio as the star.

Riess: And we want to start in on who visited the opera house over the years.

Bagley: We've had a lot of celebrated people there who I have talked to. One of them was H. G. Wells, the winner of the Nobel Prize in literature. Another was the Norwegian woman, Sigrid Undset, who won the same prize. Each of them spoke at the opera house. H. G. Wells asked me to come out to the front and to listen to what he had to say at rehearsal and to tell him whether he should speak louder and how he should get it [his talk] over to the people. That was very interesting.

Sigrid Undset went through her talk without any

Bagley: aid from me and it was interesting. She was a very wonderful woman and she talked a lot in her dressing room before she went on. She particularly wanted to know about Marian Anderson, who was very famous then as a concert artist. So, I told her that I knew about Marian Anderson. I had known her since she was a child, and I had danced with her at one of the parties that we had given for her at Hampton Institute. I'm not too sure, but I think that I had just graduated at the time. But she was one who was very interesting to talk to.

Riess: Did Marian Anderson come down to perform at Hampton Institute, or was she just a young girl then?

Bagley: Oh, she performed at the Institute at that time. She was well on her way and she performed at a great many of the schools and Hampton Institute was one of the schools that she performed at.

Riess: How would you have met H. G. Wells or Sigrid Undset?

Bagley: Well, to begin with, I took H. G. Wells through the house. I didn't meet him except at the opera house. I took him through the opera house first, and then he came to give a lecture to the public there. I met him again then and I stood back in the opera house, emptied out the house, and told him when he was [speaking] too loud or not loud enough.

Riess: Did you give all of the stars a tour of the opera house or was it just the ones who asked especially? Was it part of your job or was it just something that you would do specially?

Bagley: That was just part of my job. I showed them through just as a matter of course. If someone wanted to see the opera house, it didn't make any difference who he was. Even the most insignificant person we would show through and that made it very nice.

Riess: So, during the day, were you just in the building and on call for that service?

Bagley: Yes. If anyone came in and wanted to see the opera house, I showed them around.

Riess: How did you get the idea for the signature book?

Bagley: Well, that was more or less my idea because I thought that it was nice to have the signatures of the very famous people. We got three presidents there and a lot of the famous singers, including Marian Anderson, Kirsten Flagstad and some of the ones who are dead now.

One interesting one was Harold Lindi, who dropped dead right before the audience while he was singing in "Pagliacci." He was singing "Vesti la giubba," almost at the end, and he dropped dead right before the people. Some people who were not too familiar with opera thouht that that was part of the opera. But I knew that he was dead immediately. They took him off and it was very close to intermission. At intermission time, they told the people that they had a very sad report to make to them and that Harold Lindi had died on the stage before them. They replaced him with another tenor and the opera went on. That was the San Carlo opera.

Riess: I see that they came to perform many times. Where are they from?

Bagley: The San Carlo opera headquarters is New York. They come all around the country and they don't have any special place that they come from, except that they have offices in New York. Mr. Fortune Gallo was the founder of the organization and he planned the tour through agencies in San Francisco and in other places.

Riess: Was Gaetano Merola the general director of the opera house or of the San Francisco opera?

Bagley: He was the general director of the San Francisco opera. He had nothing to do with the opera house. The opera house is a peculiar thing. It is run and managed by the city and not by the opera company or by the symphony. The head of the opera house was called the managing director until the past managing director died, but now they have a managing director and secretary. Joe Allen is the present managing director.

But before then, we had two managing directors. The first was Selby Oppenheimer. He was a very theatrical man who brought some of the very great stars to this country. When he died, they eventually appointed a managing director. As I said, they

Bagley: have both a secretary now and a managing director who look after the job.

Riess: So, if something that comes to the opera house is a great flop, is the burden of responsibility on the director?

Bagley: No, there is no responsibility on the managing director. It's all on the concert manager. He is a man who is usually in business to make money primarily and he is pretty careful about bringing somebody that won't make money. There was a good article in the Chronicle two weeks ago by John Kornfeld, and that told how he had made and lost money on certain things. But not many thing that don't make money are brought into the opera house because they bring in only people who have great fame and who are pretty sure to draw.

The opera house is a big place, so if it is fairly well filled they are sure to make money. The house seats 3,252 people and that's a lot of money when you think that people have a top price of $3.50. There are 1,300 seats on the main floor that would certainly go for $3.50, and then there are other seats in the upper section. The boxes have approximately 200 seats and there are the Grand Tier and Dress Circle that have 835 seats. They are almost the same price as the orchestra. Then, there's the top balcony where the seats are comparatively cheap and there's 908 seats there.

As I said, there are 3,252 in the whole house. They are also allowed to sell 300 standing room places. They stand in the back of the main floor, in the back of the Dress Circle, and occasionally in the top section. They don't stand in the top section very often because we can usually fit all the 300 places we are allowed to sell on the main floor and the Dress Circle. There was a time when we didn't have a limit on the number of standing room places and they have reports that there were a great many more than 300 in.

Riess: Have there ever been any fires at the opera house?

Bagley: No fires, but all opera houses have fires and I

Bagley: think that ours will eventually come. Some of the opera houses in the world have been burned completely down, but this one hasn't had any fires at all so far. That's forty years with no fires and that's a fine record.

Riess: Were there any fires backstage?

Bagley: There have been no fires. Well, we have had small things, but nothing like the big fires that would wipe out the backstage area or the front area.

Riess: It seems that some opera houses are jinxed.

Bagley: Yes, they are. In Europe, a great many of them have had fires.

Riess: And no falling chandeliers?

Bagley: No, no falling chandeliers. People ask about the chandeliers invariably when they come in. They ask how many lights they have and so forth. We try to tell them.

I don't take people through the opera house with a big bally-hoo. I take them through simply and if they ask questions, we try to give them the answers. But we don't start out that way. Sometimes the fact that the house seats 3,252 people doesn't come out at all, but other times it comes out in their first look at the house because they want to know and we are there to tell them. It makes it much more interesting that way.

Riess: When I was thinking about jinxed opera houses, I wanted to see if you had any stories about superstitions. Don't some of the performers come with lucky pieces?

Bagley: Yes. A lot of them don't like for you to whistle across the stage because they think that it is bad luck. Wearing a hat across the stage is also thought of as bad luck.

Riess: I always think of artists and performers as being very temperamental and difficult people. Do you have any thoughts about this?

Bagley: My feeling is that if you leave them alone, they know that they are stars and they will eventually come around to your way of approaching them. Margot Fonteyn, for example, is a great world-famous ballerina from England. She was just here a few days ago as the star of the Vienna State Opera. I had gone away before then, and I had left a message saying hello to her. Then, she sent me this card saying, "Dear Julian, Thank you so much for your message. I certainly asked for you this time at the opera house. It is not the same without you. Thank you. Sincerely yours, Margot Fonteyn."

That's a nice card. I also have letters from Madame Kirsten Flagstad, who was one of the great singers of her time. [She would send them to me] two or three times a year. Madame Flagstad, as you probably know, is dead. I still get letters from her very fine accompaniest, Edwin McArthur. He sends me a note when he sees something interesting to write to me about. He's teaching at a university now and he's a very fine friend of mine.

They all liked me because I approached them as human beings. I didn't run to them the first time they came. It was probably several times before I went in. If they did something really good, I didn't fail to go back and cheer them. Madame Flagstad is that way and Leontyne Price is that way. She is certainly very gracious and a very wonderful singer. I always cheer her when she comes backstage.

And there's Carla Fracci, a famous Italian ballerina who I like very much. I go to see her when she comes in. This is she here. [Bagley shows interviewer a picture.] She is very beautiful and a very wonderful dancer.

Riess: I think that the first signature in the signature book is Merola's.

Bagley: Yes, it's Merola because he is a very important man, a very wonderful man. He was the founder of the San Francisco opera, so that gives him a very historical place. So, we got his signature first.

Riess: The book is beautiful and looks like it will last forever. Did you go out and get it?

Bagley: I didn't buy the book. The opera company owned the book; the city and county of San Francisco, they bought it and gave it to me. I had a little book of my own, and they saw what a shabby affair that was. So, they went out and bought me this nice one. There are over one hundred pages in that book and it is made of very expensive paper. It must have cost a lot of money.

Riess: Do you have the little autograph book you kept from 1932 to 1936?

Bagley: No, I didn't keep that book. There were a lot of things that I should have kept that I didn't keep.

Riess: After Merola, there are some other interesting names in 1936. There are so many people who are still performing and who must have been so young then, like Pierre Monteux--

Bagley: Pierre Monteux was way in his eighties when he died, so he must have been a good way along in age when he came to the opera house. But he was a wonderful conductor and that's what makes his signature so valuable. He conducted so many things so beautifully. I don't know anybody who conducted "Symphony Fantastique" as beautifully as he conducted it. He was just completely lost in the composition.

He was the permanent conductor of the San Francisco symphony. He conducted for a long time in San Francisco; I think that it was sixteen or seventeen years during which he was our conductor. Mr. Monteux was a very good friend of mine! Mr. and Mrs. Monteux sent me a greeting every Christmas from wherever they were, sometimes Vienna, sometimes London, sometimes Paris. But that greeting always came. Even now, Mrs. Monteux sends me a greeting every Christmas. Mr. Monteux has been dead now for many years. I can't recall just how many, but I know that he's been dead a long time.

Riess: Had the San Francisco symphony been going for many years before the opera house?

Bagley: Yes, it had. I'm not too sure of just how many years, but it was going before the opera house opened. They had concerts in the auditorium and in various other places in San Francisco before they got into the opera house. That was the main reason that they built the house, for the symphony and for the opera.

Riess: Have they cooperated as organizations very well?

Bagley: They cooperate very well. There's no reason why they shouldn't cooperate because if they didn't cooperate, it would be bad for both of them.

Riess: But there's no problem about conflicting schedules?

Bagley: There is a problem about the schedules. They have to have a certain amount of time to rehearse for the opera and that sometimes makes it difficult to have a full symphony program in the spring when the opera is going on. They rehearse four times a week--on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays--when they are playing. Some of the compositions that they play are very difficult and they have to have ample time to rehearse. They need the whole stage. It's expensive too. They have to take down the stage for the opera and that is expensive.

Riess: I noticed that in 1936 the San Carlo opera company was there, the San Francisco opera company and the Salzburg opera company--

Bagley: Yes, those are all touring companies.

Riess: When a whole company like that would come, did you have a special job?

Bagley: No, my job was just the same, showing people through the house and getting signatures of the principal artists of the company.

Riess: Under Monteux in the signature book, I see Rachmaninoff--

Bagley: Yes, Rachmaninoff, the great composer. And Gershwin should be there.

Riess: I see that Toscanini was also there that year.

Bagley: Yes, he was a guest conductor.

Riess: I also see Yehudi and Hephzibah Menuhin.

Bagley: Well, now Yehudi is the conductor of the Bath Symphony in England. He's been here once since he became the conductor at Bath, but that's his principal occupation now, conducting the Bath Symphony. He made several recordings. He is a very fine musician and a very fine person. His family is a San Francisco family.

I know Yehudi Menuhin very well. He is a very fine violinist and his sister plays the piano. They often go together for concerts and that makes it very interesting. The people are very interested in him, especially when he comes home. It's just like a great jubilee when he comes home. When they would be performing, the whole family would be there. Moishe Menuhin was his father and we kept up with him all the time.

Riess: Was the father and the whole family musical?

Bagley: I don't know whether the father was musical, but the whole family was musical. Hebzibah played the piano and Alta, another child, played too.

Riess: Looking over the signature book, I'm curious to know how much you remember about the dancers whose names are recorded there.

Bagley: Yes, a lot of dancers have been there, including Martha Graham in 1936. She was an avante garde sort of dancer, and people who believed in that sort of dancing came out in great numbers. It was good for her.

Riess: When the people who liked the avante garde sort of dancing would come out, would it seem like a completely different crowd?

Bagley: It was a very different crowd. It was a sort of religious fervor that they had for that sort of dancing and it was simply marvelous. Agnes de Mille, for example, had a great following. Her ballet of the western life was certainly a wonderful ballet. The dancers of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, who went to Europe with it, said that everywhere they went

Bagley: people were just wild about that Agnes de Mille dance. It was called "Rodeo."

The music for that was so beautiful. Aaron Copeland's music was simply thrilling! I wish that the symphony would make a regular fiesta of Aaron Copeland's music when he is here playing it. Aaron Copeland has been here and played his music and there was not an especially great crowd, nothing like some of the other crowds. I think that he is absolutely due a full house and a great many performances for his symphonies and his operas.

There is that Mexican ballet that he's done, and "Rodeo" is simply beautiful. So many people have seen the ballet and that would help a lot. I think that those things should be boosted to the sky and that they should do things to give him a very great audience. I think that it is possible to go out and work for it.

I remember a composition that we had, "St. Matthew's Passion," that drew almost nothing the first time. Then, they got ashamed of themselves and the symphony went out to churches and to various other organizations to work to fill up the house for "St. Matthew's Passion." They overran the house. It was filled and they had a group of standees. It can be done and I think that it is all up to the people who are putting it on.

Riess: Well, you have to educate your public.

Bagley: Yes, but the public resents being educated, though. You have to get them in some other way. And they will come in if you get to them in the right way.

Riess: Would there have been any people in Martha Graham's audience who would have thought that she was so strange that they would have booed or laughed?

Bagley: That's something that is not done here in America. They don't boo here. In France and in certain other countries, they would boo you, but that's what gives us so much freedom. We can do anything here in this country without being booed, and that makes it very nice.

Bagley: You had some very strange music in the symphonies. Some of the composers would play their new pieces and they have been pretty hard to take. But the audience has been very respectful and there was no booing. But in France and some of the other countries, they would boo you. They have so many strict rules there in all the places. Women are restricted from wearing hats. In the Paris opera house, they don't wear hats at all. If you get there with one, they will make you take it off.

They also have other rules. When people are late here, we let them come into the house and stand in the back until that certain number is finished. But in Paris, they don't let you go into the house at all until that number is finished. That makes it very agreeable for the singers and the performers.

Riess: But if a performance was booked for the opera house, it had already been given a round of applause just to get the booking.

Bagley: Oh, yes. If a performance has been booked, people know that it's good. Otherwise, the opera house wouldn't book it. They have to depend on the income from the performances to keep the organization going. It's not like in England where it is subsidized and the admission charge is very small. I got into a standing room place in Vienna for 60¢ and for the first night opera here they charge $5.00. As I told you, that was when I went to see "Don Giovanni" in Vienna.

Riess: In 1936, Ezio Pinza was here. Was he famous then or was he just a young performer?

Bagley: Ezio Pinza was famous then and he was famous until he died. I don't remember when he died, but he sang the star role in the Hawaiian play, "South Pacific." He was on Broadway in that too and that made him very famous and very well-known to a great many people who might not have known him in opera. That's a beautiful play and the song, "Some Enchanted Evening," is very beautiful too.

Riess: Marian Anderson was there that year too.

Bagley: Yes. Marian Anderson has been there many times and

Bagley: she has sold out the house every time she's come. She was a great favorite with the people.

Riess: When she came, did you remind her that you two had danced together?

Bagley: No, I didn't. I just went back to see her and I was very friendly with her. But I didn't say anything about the time that we danced together. I saw Marian Anderson earlier than that. She visited us at Camp Dix, New Jersey, when I was in the army and she sang for us. She was very well received.

Riess: Was she very easily approached?

Bagley: Yes, she was very easily approached, but she wasn't too enthusiastic about some things. She wasn't too enthusiastic about meeting people. She was there to sing. That was the principal thing. If she met people, that was all right. If she didn't meet them, it was all right also.

Riess: Did she travel with a group in any way?

Bagley: No, I don't think that she traveled with a group in any way. The agents are pretty clever people, and they knew that there was more money in a single artist than in one [singing with a group] where the income would have to be cut down. This was especially true since the people were such great admirers of her singing.

Riess: As I went through the book, I wished that the people would have made more comments.

Bagley: We didn't encourage them to make comments because, in the first place, the book was very limited in its number of names, and the book is a very expensive book. As a rule, most of them didn't write much that was interesting. Some would say, "So glad to be at the opera house."

I remember that Henry Krips' brother, wrote in the book when he signed it, "At last! - Henry Krips." I imagine that he meant that, at last, they had gotten him in the opera house. He had wanted to come for a long time, but his brother's fame overshadowed him, and I imagine that that's why no agents would book him. You see, you are almost at the mercy

Bagley: of the agents in that business. They have to feel that they are going to make money off of you. Otherwise, they have no love for you.

Some of our things have been wonderful successes when we didn't have any idea that they would be such big successes until they had made a great success. In New York, they have mostly dancers. There's one group that is a fabulous drawing card. They have come two years, I think, in succession. They are very wonderful dancers. They are the Moiseyev Dancers from Russia. They are subsidized by the state, so they don't have to charge as much for them as they would for a big organization like that that was private.

Riess: Who was Conrad Nagel?

Bagley: Conrad Nagel was a very famous moving picture star. Doesn't he say, "Hi, Julian!" there [in the book]?

Riess: Yes, that's what I wanted to ask you about.

Bagley: He was very friendly with me and he was a very great moving picture star. He drew thousands of people all over the country with his movies. He was very popular at the time. He was so popular that it was easy for the agents and a great temptation for the agents not to book him into the opera house. But they did book him into the opera house, and he had a very good crowd.

Conrad Nagel was one of the movie stars who was there. Nino Martini was there too. He was a great moving picture star. Three or four moving picture stars were there. Jeanette McDonald was another one of them. Her name is in the book.

Riess: That year also there were such people as the Uday-Shanker Indian Dancers.

Bagley: Oh, they were wonderful and famous--a great crowd of dancers. Uday-Shankar has been back here since, more than once. He was very interested in the San Francisco audiences because they were so very pleased with his performance.

Last time he was here, he asked me, "Do you remember me?"

Bagley: I said, "You bet I do!" and then I went into one of his dance poses.

He said, "My God! Do you remember that?"

I said, "Yes."

Riess: And then there was the Don Cossack Chorus.

Bagley: Yes, that's a good chorus--very good singers. The men have deep, heavy basses.

Riess: Are they from Russia?

Bagley: Yes, definitely. They're from Russia and so is Moiseyev group of dancers. They're from Moscow. They invited me to come to Moscow last summer, but I was more interested in the Hermitage Museum in Leningrad. So, I went to Leningrad instead. I touched down at Moscow and was there for about three hours, but I didn't see any of the dancers.

They said, "We'll drive you around if you come."

Riess: You must keep up on your correspondence.

Bagley: I do. The Moiseyev Dancers have written me from various parts of Russia, from down on the Black Sea when they were having their vacation, lying in the sun and having a good time. And, as I said, I have gotten letters from Mr. and Mrs. Monteux when Mr. Monteux was alive, and now still from Mrs. Monteux. Other people in the theatre have also written to me.

Riess: Another name in the book was that of the Joos Ballet.

Bagley: Yes, that was a very popular ballet and very avante garde in its treatment of certain subjects in the ballet. "The Green Table" was one that they did that was marvelously received. They had a fine group of dancers.

Riess: That year, there was also the Trudi Shoop Ballet.

Bagley: Yes, that was another one of the modern ballets that was very good and very well received. People liked her.

Riess: And then there was the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo? Is that the same as the Ballet Russe?

Bagley: No, the Ballet Russe is different from the Ballet Monte Carlo. The Ballet Russe is from Russia. They danced all over the world. They were a great success in New York and Chicago, in Los Angeles and here in San Francisco, but they did not dance at the Opera house.

Riess: In recent years, haven't some of the ballet companies not wanted to dance in San Francisco because they think that the stage is not adequate?

Bagley: I haven't heard that before.

Riess: There was one company that was in the country and didn't perform here, but went instead to Los Angeles.

Bagley: Oh, well, that must have been that they couldn't get the opera house and that they might have been able to get the veterans' building. And that has a smaller, inadequate stage for a big dancing troupe. I imagine that that's what they meant.

Riess: But, over the years, people haven't complained about inadequate size or facilities or anything like that?

Bagley: No, we have very good equipment there at the opera house. I have been in a great many big opera houses all over the world, and I have seen their stages especially. The one in Prague, where Mozart had such success with "Don Giovanni," has a small stage and a small house too. That house seats only 900 people. That would be smaller than our veterans' building, which seats at least a thousand. And the stage is nowhere near as adequate as ours. But they have great success. They produce various operas there during the year and they have great success with them.

Riess: How many times have they had to put a new floor down in the opera house?

Bagley: Well, this one that they got just a few days ago is the first new one that I know of. It's a new floor, all varnished and very well equipped. The singers and

Bagley: all the people who play there are just fascinated with it. The equipment there is very good.

As I said, I've been in the opera houses in Paris and Vienna and Prague. I've also been in the opera house in Leningrad and in the old Metropolitan in New York, of course. This is way out, there. The opera house here is as good as anything that you'll find any place. Vienna has got a lot more things that move, and they can change scenes much quicker than we can. But the opera house here has everything in the way of equipment.

Riess: Did you keep old programs, Julian?

Bagley: No, it can get overbearing after a certain length of time, and I remember most of these things pretty well. I knew the dancers and that helps me to remember. I knew a lot of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo dancers personally. The other dancers, the Moiseyev, I've talked with them.

Riess: In 1937, I was interested to see that Rudolph Serkin was there performing since his son Peter is now--

Bagley: Yes, Peter is performing too. Peter plays the piano very well. I don't recall any other person who had an offspring that performed there. I heard Peter on the radio about twenty years ago, I guess, and he was with his father in a rest camp somewhere in Vermont or New Hampshire--I don't recall which one it was. He talked on the radio then. He was just a boy, and I was surprised to see that he was coming out now and playing so well.

Riess: In 1938, there were some speakers who came to the opera house, such as Mrs. Martin Johnson.

Bagley: Mrs. Martin Johnson, Osa Johnson, was the wife of the explorer. She talked about her experience with big game hunting in Africa.

Riess: Would that kind of performance have filled the opera house too?

Bagley: Yes, because she had an international name. She was famous all over the world and that's the thing that draws people to a big house like that.

Riess: And then Herbert Hoover came and spoke?

Bagley: Yes, Herbert Hoover came just after he was president. He had been to Africa for the Red Cross, and he made a speech about his trip to Africa. It was very interesting.

Riess: Did you have any personal contact with him?

Bagley: I spoke with him. He didn't say anything memorable, but I talked with him. He signed the book.

Riess: Julian, how did you present the book to them? With each performer, did you try to pick the right moment?

Bagley: Yes, I tried to do that because that makes it so much easier for you and for them; that makes it a pleasant memory. They don't think that we're just pushing something on them. It's something that they want to do as much as we want to do it.

Here's a nice experience about getting the book signed by presidents. We had a big meeting there that called for President Eisenhower to come. I was standing in the back and I wanted to go in to see him. Of course, the FBI men wouldn't let me go. One FBI man saw me, and I had helped them arrange and told them the secrets of the house for the United Nations meeting there. So, they said, "He's all right. Let him go, by all means!"

So, I went to President Eisenhower and asked him to sign the book. And when I gave him the book and he was ready to sign, he said, "How long have you had this book, son?" And I said, "[Since] way back in 1932." "Ah," he said, "Those were the good old Republican days." Then he thrust out his hand, seized mine, and shook it vigorously. Everybody laughed around there because that's something that the presidents don't do--get too familiar with people. So, he signed the book and we talked all about some other things.

That's the second president who signed it and the other one was Harry Truman, who signed it too. He was not memorable because he didn't say anything. His was just a matter-of-fact sort of approach.

Bagley: We had the Crown Prince and the Princess of Denmark, and we got him to sign the book. He spoke to the house in Danish and also in English from the end box. So, we considered that actually a participation and we got his signature. We don't get people who are just visiting the house for a performance. We've had a lot of celebrated motion picture actors and a lot of other celebrated people who came to a performance in the house, and we didn't get them because we don't like to do that. We like to get just the people who are participating in some performance. That makes it much easier to keep it under control.

Otherwise, it would get out of control. And once they've signed it, they don't sign it a second time. Once is enough.

Riess: Do the various opera companies keep changing their personnel?

Bagley: No, not too often. The opera companies hang pretty closely to a star if she's successful. If they change, that means that that star is not booked in that particular opera. She may not be booked in the Metropolitan, and if she dropped out of the Metropolitan, chances are that she's dropped out of here too. It's not so easy for her to get engagements at other places.

Riess: Did you ever have people who wished that they could sign it again or that they could improve on their signatures?

Bagley: We've had people who have asked to sign it a second time when they have come in and remembered it. They remembered me as the custodian and they wanted to sign it a second time. I simply explained that we don't get it signed a second time because it is a waste of the book and a waste of their time. We have to be careful with that book because it will eventually run out. But now we can keep it from running out too soon by not having people repeat their signatures.

Riess: Sometimes when you're young, you have an immature signature and then when you're old, you have a signature with a great flourish--

Bagley: Oh, yes. There is a great deal of difference and the signature speaks of success too. Kirsten had very nice handwriting.

Riess: 1939 was the year that Crown Prince Frederick and Princess Ingrid of Denmark signed. What performance had they come to see?

Bagley: I don't recall. I think that it was the Scandinavian program that he was in. It tells in the book, what these people signed for. If I had the big book, I could look it up, but off-hand, I think that it was the all Scandanavian program that he signed the book for.

Riess: Who was Vincent Sheean?

Bagley: Vincent Sheean was an author, a popular author who had a good many successes. That's why he signed. There was another principal author who signed the book--James Hilton, who wrote Good-bye Mr. Chips.

Riess: I wouldn't think that authors would be very good performers or speakers.

Bagley: Hilton was a very good speaker. He talked more or less of his experiences.

Riess: Would there be a chance for people in the audience to bring books for him to autograph?

Bagley: Oh, yes. People would let him go back for that purpose.

Riess: What are the restrictions on people going backstage? How is that managed?

Bagley: Well, they have to get something from the performer saying that the performer is willing to see them. Then, that is given to the doorman, who guards the door from the front of the house to the backstage area. And he will let them in and whatever they want, the performer will do it. A great many people have brought records back for different performers who had made recordings to sign. The performers are glad to do that and the doorman usually cooperates with letting them in because that's something that is agreeable to the performer, the singer or the artist.

Riess: Was that part of your job? Were you the doorman?

Bagley: No, I was not the doorman. They have a separate doorman on the right-hand side.

Riess: So, for night performances, you would have been out front?

Bagley: Yes, I was out front. I went back only to get the book signed. I had a separate key to get back and I didn't have to bother with the man who was on the door. But I cooperated with him; if he didn't want people to go, then I would resist going back.

Riess: So, if you were out front so much, you must have gotten to know the patrons.

Bagley: Yes, I knew a great many of the patrons. I think that I mentioned Mrs. Alma de Bretteville Spreckels giving me a ticket which I gave to the secretary of the royal opera house in Copenhagen. She invited me to come to see Copenhagen and she has written to me every year since that. That must have been fifteen years ago or so that she was here.

Riess: Lin Yutang was here.

Bagley: Lin Yutang was an author, as you probably know. He was a Chinese philosopher. There was a lot of interest in his speaking.

Riess: In 1940, Madame Curie came to the opera house.

Bagley: Madame Curie was the great medical person. She's an interesting woman, a French woman.

Riess: When she was onstage, did she try to explain her discoveries for the audience?

Bagley: Yes, she did. She had a hard time getting started. But that sort of thing is always interesting to people.

Riess: Eleanor Roosevelt came, before the war had started, I think. What was she speaking about then?

Bagley: Yes, it was before the war. She was speaking of life in general and of what she thought of certain people

Bagley: who were doing certain things. She had a very wide subject and she covered a lot of area.

Riess: Did Franklin Roosevelt ever come?

Bagley: No, he never came to the opera house.

Riess: When Eleanor Roosevelt came, was there any picketing?

Bagley: No, there was no picketing. We've had a few pickets, but they didn't picket Eleanor Roosevelt. She came in in a very calm way and she went out the same way. Nobody booed or hissed her.

Of course, we are less free in that sort of thing in this country than they are in Europe. In Europe, they wouldn't think anything of booing a person like that in Europe if they wanted to.

I remember when I went to see the ballet in Paris, there was one dancer in the group that the audience didn't like, and every time he appeared, they booed him. That would never happen here.

Riess: Can you remember any incidents about political picketing at the opera house?

Bagley: Yes, we've had some political pickets out front when the Russians [came]. There was a great number of them.

Riess: Paul Robeson was here too. Was he somebody who you knew well?

Bagley: No, I don't know Paul Robeson too well. I spoke to him and got his signature and so forth, but I wouldn't say that I know him.

Leontyne Price is the singer who I know best of all. She is very friendly.

Riess: Might she have come to visit you?

Bagley: She's never been to my house. I've just seen her at the opera house. She bought one of my books and I was glad of that.

Riess: I have heard that you gave nice little dinner parties for some of--

Bagley: Yes, I did. I gave a great many nice dinner parties

Julian Bagley with the Moiseyev Dance Company at a post-performance supper held at his home in the summer of 1969.

Photograph by Cecil J. Thompson

Julian Bagley with the Moiseyev Dance Company at a post-performance supper held at his home in the summer of 1969.

Photograph by Cecil J. Thompson

Bagley: for people around town, people who'd attend the opera. I invited a couple of the Moiseyev dancers to come. They came and they had a great time. Here's a nice little memory of that: It was the first night, and they are not supposed to go out the first night because it makes them too tired after the excitement of the first night. They told me that that was the case. But my friend Vladimir Vladimonov, one of the Moiseyev dancers, said, "We're not supposed to go out the first night, but I think that if you ask the head of the company, he will let us come."

So, I asked him and he said, "Yes, I'll let them go, but don't keep them up too late." But we stayed up until 3:30 in the morning and I guess that's pretty late. But we were having a good time, good food and a lot of fine friendliness in the group, so we didn't find it possible to get away before 3:30. That was very nice.

Riess: There were some of the dancers who spoke English, I guess.

Bagley: Yes, there were some speaking English and they translated [for the others]. They wanted me to learn Russian, but Russian is almost impossible for me because the lettering is so different from our lettering. I find the same trouble with Greek. I was in Greece last summer for a whole week and in Russia for a whole week, and I didn't come away knowing any more Russian than I knew when I went there.

I can say "I'm very glad to see you" in Russian, and that gets you started any place. I'd say that to the dancers and to some people in Russia when I was there this summer. But, I don't profess to be able to carry on a conversation in Russian.

Riess: You do know several other languages though, don't you?

Bagley: I know French and Italian pretty well. I can read French and I can read Italian, but the trouble with Greek and Russian is that the lettering is so different that you can't read it at all.

Riess: Did you study French and Italian, or did you just pick them up along the way?

Bagley: I just picked them up. It was a lot of fun picking them up.

Riess: Now, in 1941, there's H. V. Kaltenborn--

Bagley: He was a great radio and newspaper commentator, very reliable. I haven't heard anybody as good as he since he stopped speaking on the radio. I don't know whether he is still living or not, but he was very good.

Riess: Dorothy Thompson.

Bagley: Dorothy Thompson was a very good newspaper woman. She was at the opera house for her big meetings. She had a big name and she drew very well. She was there to speak on current events.

Riess: Then there were some army shows. There were lots of them as the war progressed, like "This is the Army"--

Bagley: Yes. "This is the Army" was a good musical show with all army personnel. Of course, the men who had women's parts were dressed as women and they were very good.

Riess: In 1941 you had the signature of Major General Stilwell--

Bagley: That is not Major General Stilwell's actual signature. That was a very peculiar coincidence. I went up to get Major General Stilwell's signature and he was in a box. One of the aides--a Lieutenant Major, I think it was--said, "Major General Stilwell's in the box, and he's busy now. Give it to me and I'll take it in and have him sign it." He, however, didn't take it to Major Stillwell. He signed it himself and brought it back to me, saying, "That's Major General Stilwell's signature." I asked Mrs. Stilwell some time later if that was Major General Stilwell's signature, and she said that it wasn't. That was a long time afterward, so I just missed Major General Stilwell.

But, as a rule, the opera house doesn't want me to let anybody sign the book out of my presence. So, I've been able to get a very accurate group of signatures that way.

Riess: Was that the only such incident?

Bagley: Yes, that was the only incident. I quit letting people take it away from me to sign. I stand right beside them and wait until they sign it. And I remember it easier that way too.

Riess: It sounds as if the signature book began as your project, but that then it became the baby of the whole opera house.

Bagley: Yes, it did. Most of the people around there liked to sign it. I've had people ask me to sign it who had no right to do so, and I simply told them in a polite way that it was just for certain people in the opera company and they let it go at that.

Riess: José Limon, the dancer, came in 1941.

Bagley: Yes. I don't remember too much about him, except that he was popular and that he drew a good crowd.

Riess: During the war years of the early forties, there was very little going on. Was the opera house closed down during that time?

Bagley: No, the opera was never closed down. They could always get enough super attractions to keep it going. They don't book anything in there unless it has a big reputation because that's the only way you can fill the house. Agents are pretty shrewd. We book things through Hurok or through some other agent and they have already had a chance to decide whether the person is worth booking and whether he will make money for the local booker. That's the way things are done.

Riess: So, the people were still coming out to be entertained, despite the great difficulties of war time.

Bagley: Yes, the people came in great numbers during the war. There were a lot of servicemen who would come to see things that had to do with the army, and that made for a full house.

Riess: The choreographer for the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo

Riess: who signed was named Nijinska [1943]. That wasn't the great dancer, was it?

Bagley: No, when the name ends with an "a," that means it is a woman.

I went to Paris and I took flowers to Nijinsky's grave. I was very pleased to see that there were a great many other flowers on his grave. That is a very famous cemetery where a great many famous people are buried. I don't recall its name now; I'd have to look in my notebook to be sure. [Sacre Coeur]

Riess: What's your notebook, Julian?

Bagley: It is a notebook of my travels in the various European countries which I mentioned to you before.

Riess: Have you been keeping notebooks over all these years?

Bagley: No, I haven't. I kept some at the opera house, but I discontinued them. But this is a rather new project that I've begun. It's nice to keep a notebook, because then you can turn right back and remember things easily.

Riess: After a long day at the opera house, it sounds like you very often came back for a long night at the opera house.

Bagley: Yes, I did. I came for the performances in the afternoon and also at night. But it didn't seem long at all to me because I enjoyed it all so much.

Riess: Did you cook for yourself and live alone?

Bagley: Yes, I cooked for myself. It's easy to cook for yourself. You know just what you want, how much you want and when you want to eat. That makes it all comparatively easy.

Riess: Did you go out much?

Bagley: Yes, I went out a good deal. Different friends invited me to dinner. I was living then on Clay Street. I've bought a house now that is on Bernard Street on Russian Hill. But then I was living on

Bagley: Clay Street, just one minute from the Fairmont. Martinelli, the great tenor, would take me home night after night. His valet was a great cook and they would invite me for some food with them.

Riess: There was a lot of dance in 1943, including the Ballet Theatre--

Bagley: Yes, The Ballet Theatre was, at that time, the best dance group that there was. That was a thrilling group. But, like everything else, a great many people left that ballet and got into other companies where they got a better fee. That made a difference in the company.

Riess: That's interesting that you say that because there were Anthony Tudor, Jerome Robbins and Michael Kidd--

Bagley: Well, Michael Kidd has gone into writing Broadway shows and that brings a lot more money than a single person in the ballet. Jerome Robbins wrote a lot of very good things for Broadway too. Both of those people have left.

Riess: In the performance of "This is the Army," there was someone who signed the book and listed his job as "spoons-player." What is a spoons-player?

Bagley: Well, he may have played some instrument that is comparable to a spoon. I don't know exactly what that means. "This is the Army" was a very good show.

Riess: Was Irving Berlin there for the performance?

Bagley: Yes, he was there. I talked with him and he signed the book. During one performance, he was out front and I wanted him to sign the book.

He said, "Bring it back to me and I'll sign it."

That's a good signature. I consider that a world famous signature that will last. Most of those signatures there won't last too long, but I feel that Irving Berlin was a great musician and that his will last. He was born in Russia, you know.

Riess: If there was someone who was really famous, did you

Riess: try to have them start a new page or make sure that they had a big space?

Bagley: I tried to get the very famous people on the front page, and then I would make a notation in the book of where they were. I made a notation for each artist in the big book, telling where they could be found. It is easy to turn to them and to find them.

Riess: There were a lot of popular people there that year, like Bing Crosby and Dinah Shore.

Bagley: Yes, Bing Crosby and Dinah Shore both sang and people came in great numbers to hear them because they were very popular and very well known from the movies.

Riess: They were doing a festival of Gershwin music. Was Gershwin there too?

Bagley: No, Gershwin wasn't there. Gershwin was there only for the one time that we've mentioned. Gershwin was a very popular man and people came out in great numbers to hear him. He had a wonderful personality. I remember the first night when he played. He came back to the front and people were surrounding him. He dashed out and crashed through the circle, saying, "There's my friend!" He was speaking about me and he came to me and we shook hands.

I am very friendly with Stravinsky too. He is one of the musicians who likes me very much. He's still living, you know.

Riess: No, he just died very recently. He has contributed a lot in his writing about himself. He lived a long life, but he died during the past year.

Bagley: I didn't know that. He was a good man and a fine musician--one of the best in the world. I was very privileged to hear him and to know him. The last time he was here, he threw both arms around me when he came backstage, and he yelled, "There's my friend!"

[Interview #3, July 18, 1972]

The Aura of the Opera

Riess: It's very unusual that you got to know opera as well as you did. I think that opera is difficult and complicated.

Bagley: It's difficult, but it's very beautiful and it makes all other kinds of singing look sick. When you get used to opera, nothing else would pleasure you in the way of singing.

Riess: Do you think that most of the people who come to the opera really understand opera?

Bagley: I think that they like it without understanding too much about it, very much as myself. It's the singing, the pitch, that pleases you immensely and you don't find any of that in jazz singing and in ordinary singing. It isn't there. But it's all there in opera and you can't duplicate it in any other field of singing. That's the way I feel about it.

It really moves me. I went to the opera in Vienna, Warsaw and Leningrad and they all pleased me very much, although I didn't understand any of those languages. I don't understand any Austrian or, of course, any Russian. But it was all there. The ballet was in the opera as well as the wonderful singing and you felt that that was a great place to enjoy yourself.

Riess: So, it's really the sound and not what happens?

Bagley: Yes, it's the sound. You don't have to bother with

Bagley: the words at all. If you've got any imagination, you can place the words and the meaning in there and let it go at that. That's the way I do.

I've seen opera in San Francisco and New York, as well as in Warsaw. When I was in Warsaw last summer, they had "Il Trovatore." And there was an opera that I think I have discussed already, one of Tchaikovsky's which I didn't know existed. It was very pleasing.

Riess: Over the years, you've probably gotten favorite operas, favorite roles and favorite stars. What and who are some of them?

Bagley: Leontyne Price is one of my favorite singers and "Madame Butterfly" is one of my favorite operas. Hisi Kodi, a Japanese girl in "Madame Butterfly," was outstanding. She was just the right size and she had the right rhythm in her movements. She was glorious. She had long hair too and she just let it loose at the end of the opera and it fell all over. None of the others who have done the role have had long hair. They've all had wigs and that made a big difference.

Riess: I wonder why opera has gotten to be such a social thing?

Bagley: Well, my feeling is that [opera gives you] something you can pay attention to without going wild. It is something very educational because you keep moving ahead in opera. There is something different all the time for you because you understand it more as you go along.

Riess: But in San Francisco it is always associated with all the social life before and after--

Bagley: Yes, it is. I think that that's because it is relatively new. The children who have come up with it in Paris and Vienna and so forth haven't had a chance to get into that social rut and I think that's the difference. Opera is a comparatively new thing in America. I don't recall when the first one was done.

Bagley: In the San Francisco War Memorial Opera House, the first one was done on October 15, 1932. That was Claudia Muzio in "Tosca" and she was a marvelous singer. Everybody liked her so much. I think that I've already mentioned that I took flowers to her grave in Rome when I was there. There was a marvelous monument, that looked just like her, sitting down on the tombstone.

Riess: Do you have any other favorite operas?

Bagley: "Il Trovatore" is a favorite and "Aida" is too. That's where Leontyne Price made her wonderful impression on the people. The songs in there are just marvelous for her and she sings them so well. She, of course, looks the part, which is nice. Her make-up is so good. She has a wig in that that is very becoming to her. We have a wig-maker right at the opera house who studies the styles very carefully and they are very pleased with what he does for them in the way of wigs.

Riess: That makes me want to know more about the opera costuming.

Bagley: We get our costumes from Goldstein and Company. We don't keep any costumes year-round as the New York Metropolitan, the Paris opera and those places do. There, they have their own costumes and they keep them there all year around. They have a special man to take care of them, but we don't have anybody all through the year. Goldstein's sends someone in to help us and we have our own men who help with the costumes. And the costumes that we use look very new and fresh and elegant.

We do things here in a big way, as well as I've seen at any opera any place. And a great many times, we've outdistanced them.

Riess: If a certain opera is performed one year and again the next, is the set changed?

Bagley: Well, we change a few things each year in the costuming and staging. But they are pretty much the same throughout the years because it costs too much to make a complete change.

Riess: Who else is in attendance on the stars behind the scenes in addition to the wig-maker?

Bagley: We have a man who pulls the curtain. He is very important and has been with the company for years. After the curtain falls, he opens the backstage curtain and lets the singers go out to take their bows.

Riess: Are the dressers--and the other people like that--pretty much the same every year?

Bagley: Yes, they're pretty much the same because they have to be pretty careful about the dressing and they have to know what they are doing. So, they have the same people pretty much all the time.

Riess: Have you ever been backstage when the stars are coming off?

Bagley: No, I never go backstage. I'm interested in their action from the front, and I never go backstage unless something is not going on. Then I go back and I talk occasionally to the stars and the conductors. That's a nice action. I know quite a number of the conductors and quite a number of the stars, and it's nice to see them at close range when they come off. After they're finished, I go back, but never when they are actually performing. I find it more fun out front than backstage.

The average person just loves to get backstage. He thinks that's everything, but the whole thing is different when you get backstage. The sight of the stage is very different when you get back there and the sight of the singers is very different.

Riess: I was thinking of the idea of the contrast between their singing happily in a role and then coming off-stage and, perhaps, being furious about the way their dress wasn't fitting or something like that.

Bagley: Not too many opera singers are very temperamental. They have worked hard to get where they are and they want to stay there. They don't carry on in the way that some of the other people carry on. They're all very

Bagley: wonderful.

Singers like Leontyne Price, for example, and Lily Pons, have worked hard to get where they are. Incidentally, I heard Lily Pons when she made her first American broadcast. She was very exciting then and she's very exciting in opera. Her broadcast was made up of songs from operas.

Riess: Some of the opera singers, like Maria Callas, are famous for their temperament.

Bagley: Maria Callas is an exception. She sang here at the auditorium, but she never sang opera here. She had a big crowd there. She wanted to sing an opera here, but I think that the contract called for her getting more than any other star. She discovered through her agent that there were some stars getting as much as she was getting--at least, the story has come down to me that way--and she didn't want to sing if anybody was getting as much as she was. She sent me word from the auditorium where she sang that she wanted to come over and see the opera house, but she didn't want to meet with certain people over there. And that was the reason--she had refused to come after she found [out about the other singers' salaries].

But, at the last minute, she ducked out on me. She sent word that she wasn't coming and I never saw Callas. I had a chance to see her when she sang at the auditorium, but since I thought that she was coming to sing at the opera, I didn't bother to go. She's a very great actress, they tell me, and that gives her a big following.

Riess: Joan Sutherland was another one who was there.

Bagley: Yes, Joan Sutherland was there. She doesn't have any temperament at all and she is very easy to handle. She's very charming in all her singing. It's wonderful that she's brought back so many things that people never thought about hearing in the old days. She's a great actress and singer. We saw her in "Lucia" here one year and she was wonderful in that.

Bagley: Her husband, Richard Bonynge, is very active in discovering new things. He is on the hunt for new things and he's recorded a lot of ballet music. That's where you have to really be on your toes for the right rhythmical approach in ballet. He's done it very well. This year, I congratulated him on the new recordings that he had made of some of the operas and some of the ballets. He told me that they don't want to do too many new things and that he has to work very hard to keep on the alert to give them something new all the time.

Riess: Is it the companies who don't like to do too many new things?

Bagley: It poses a great risk for the companies. People don't come to new things. They're used to the old things like "Madame Butterfly" and "Aida" and they're not coming to some of the newer things. But when the right man, the right star and the right conductor are behind it, they'll come to see new things.

Riess: There were some operas that were given their debuts at San Francisco?

Bagley: They did do some new ones, but I don't recall what they were.

It's hard to produce new operas. In the first place, they cost a tremendous amount of money. In the second place, you can't get them back in with the audience. Not many people come to completely new things unless they have someone in them like Joan Sutherland. That makes it easy for them. That couple could do new things and to work on new things... It takes a lot of time and costs a lot of money to learn a completely new opera and that's why they're so seldom given. Richard Bonynge is a very fine and a very alert man. He is after new things all the time and I think that he and his wife, Joan Sutherland, are going to give us some fine things from time to time that have just been uncovered.

The Signature Book, to 1945

Riess: We've gotten through the signature book up through the war years. There was one performance of "The Triumph of Hope" at which you got the signatures of Roger Lapham, the mayor of San Francisco; Robert Gordon Sproul, the president of the University; Catherine Nimitz, the wife of the admiral; and Rear Admiral Edward Jones. Do you recall what they would have signed the book for?

Bagley: The Mayor, as well as the rest of them, would probably have been speaking. We got all of the mayors of San Francisco from 1932 to the present day.

Riess: Was Catherine Nimitz a special friend of yours?

Bagley: Yes, she was very friendly with me. She came to the symphony years after Admiral Nimitz had died. She came every afternoon. I was a great admirer of hers and of her husband. He was very friendly and very friendly with me. When Bunche was the secretary at the United Nations, he came out and he stayed with Admiral Nimitz.

Admiral Nimitz said to me, "Wait here a moment. I want to take you over and introduce you to Ralph Bunche." I thought that that was such a friendly gesture. So, I met Ralph Bunche that way.

Riess: Did you take him around the opera house?

Bagley: No, I didn't. He was there for some meeting--I think that it was a meeting for the United Nations--and I didn't take him around because he had been there before. I just went over to greet him through Admiral Nimitz, as I mentioned.

Riess: Ralph Bunche died quite recently.

Bagley: Yes, he died comparatively young and I don't think that he was more than in his mid-sixties.

Riess: Leonard Bernstein signed the book.

Bagley: Yes. Bernstein is a wonderful man, full of fun, rhythm, kindness and good humor. You can feel that in his music. That's what he tried to get over

Bagley: to people. He's done so many fine things. "On the Town" is one of his great musical pieces, and we had a ballet that was based on that done at the opera house.

Riess: Do you think that there's a lot of general excitement among the performers when someone like Bernstein comes to town?

Bagley: Yes. He has a great power and it's genuine too. The people out front like him very much.

Riess: I wonder if it's hard for the symphony to fall in with a new conductor.

Bagley: I think that some conductors are better for the symphony than others. If they are doing something very new or very avante garde, then there's a lot of work on that. Some of them don't like to work too long.

Riess: That year, 1944, "Porgy and Bess" was done.

Bagley: "Porgy and Bess" was done with Gershwin, I think the first time, at the opera house. That was a very exciting rehearsal. I sat down front and watched them. Monteux was full of rhythm and so was Gershwin.

"Porgy and Bess" was relatively new. The play was made from the novel, which had great success. It sold many copies. The only reason that they would do it in opera is because it has some sort of pull and power in it.

Riess: But "Porgy and Bess" really isn't an opera, is it? Isn't it more of a musical?

Bagley: Well, it's pretty close to some of the operas that we have. It's done in English and people understand it. That's what makes it so popular. There are a lot of songs in it that people knew from the Broadway show, and then they knew and enjoyed it in the opera form. "It Ain't Necessarily So" is one of the songs in there that is so good, and there is a lot of movement on the stage. People liked it who came to see it at the opera house. That was a great achievement of Gershwin's.

Bagley: Of course, the opera house seats more than any of the Broadway theaters where it played, and that gave it a great deal of success. That was one of the great American operas, the greatest, I would say, of all. It went to Europe and people liked it immensely there.

Riess: Were there any well-known performers in "Porgy and Bess?"

Bagley: I don't recall who sang it in the opera. In the early versions of that production, Leontyne Price was the star, you know. That was one of the things that gave her a great deal of fame. We had "Porgy and Bess," of course, at the opera house as a play. That gave it a lot of push ahead. It was there as a play and then it came back later as an opera.

It's a very good play. I like it very much. It has everything to make you like it. There's a very good dance in it, and then there's one place where they start off on a picnic. That's a very good scene. You have a lot of movement there and a lot of genuine singing. That's very good.

It's all different. Gershwin had that kind of movement in his person. You just liked him right away. He was full of good humor and full of a lot of rhythm. I remember that we did some things from "Porgy and Bess" before we played it as an opera. Mr. Monteux was our conductor then and you could just get the rhythm of Monteux from "Porgy and Bess." He was moving about in a rhythmical way.

Riess: That kind of rhythm is really not Gershwin's tradition, is it? Isn't it the sort of southern and Negro--?

Bagley: Well, of course, Gershwin got his idea from reading the book, I imagine. He certainly would have read the book before he could produce an opera, and that has all the rhythm of the southern Negro. He's got it produced so genuinely, that it makes the piece very wonderful.

It was easy to go astray in that sort of thing. You can overdo it sometimes. But he didn't overdo

Bagley: it. He went right along beautifully. And he came out here when Mr. Monteux conducted, so it was conducted with great authority.

Riess: Did Leontyne Price ever talk to you about what her favorite roles were?

Bagley: No, she didn't. I talked to her very often, but I never talked about her roles. I imagine that the things that she does speak well for the roles that she likes. I imagine that she likes to do "Aida." She does that so well and she looks so well in "Aida."

Riess: You were saying that Joan Sutherland would be interested in a new role. Do you think that Leontyne Price and most stars would be interested in opening up a new--?

Bagley: Yes. I think that Leontyne Price is very progressive, very musical. She went to college in Ohio, I believe, and they were very interested there in music. That's where she got her start. She's had a chance to sing in so many things. She sang as a soloist and then she's been in opera. She's done "Aida" and "Il Trovatore" and one or two others at the opera house, and all of those are very good roles. "Aida" suits her immensely.

Riess: Is she married?

Bagley: She was married to the singer -- I don't recall now what his name was, but he sang with her in several lighter things.

Riess: Did he travel with her when she was performing?

Bagley: He traveled with her then. He doesn't come here at all because they are not together now, as I understand.

Riess: In general, do the performers who have families travel alone and leave their families at home?

Bagley: Well, some of them travel alone because they feel that it's a handicap to have somebody with them, telling them what to do and criticizing them. They are careful about that.

Julian Bagley with the Guest Book, 1947.

Photograph by Roy Flamm

Illustration: Pages from the Signature Book

ANGELO J. ROSSI

The Mayor of San Francisco

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Signatures of Artists Who Have Appeared in The War Memorial Opera House

Gaetano Merola 1
General Director
S. F. Opera Ass^{n} 1936

Pierre Monteux 2
Conductor San Francisco Symphony 1936

Robert Watt Miller
Pres S. F. Opera Assn.

Alfred Hertz 3

Hans Leschke 4 1936

L. Stokowski 5

Edward Moffatt 6

Armando F. Agnini 7
Stage Director S. F. Opera Assn. 1936

Stanley MacLewee 8--1936 Season--

Andre Ferrier 9 1936 Season

S. Rachmanioff 10 Arturo Toscanini 11
1937

Yehudi Menuhin 12 1937

Hebzibah Menuhin 13 1937

1

SIGNATURES OF ARTISTS WHO HAVE APPEARED IN THE WAR MEMORIAL OPERA HOUSE

Gaetano Merola 1
General Director
S.F. Opera Assn 1936

Pierre Monteux 2
Conductor San Francisco Symphony 1936

Robert Watt Miller
Pres S.F. Opera Assn

Alfred Hertz 3

Hans Leschke 4 1936

[illegible] 5

Edward J. Moffatt 6

Armando F. Agnini 7
Stage Director S.F. Opera Assn 1936

Stanley MacKenzie 8 — 1936 Season —

André Ferrier 9 1936 Season

[illegible] 10 1937 Arturo Toscanini 11

[illegible] Menuhin 12 1937

[illegible]

J. Smuts 1

Anthony Eden 2

Halifax 3

Patrice Munsel 4
May 27, '45

Evelyn Crocker 5 May 27 '45

Stuart Ross. No. 6

George M. Mardikian 7 May 28, 1945

Bernadette Schmitt, 6 June 1945 8

R. R. Msgr. Donald A. MacLean 6 June 1945 9

Alexander Loudon 10

V. Hoo Chi-Tsai 11 June 14, 1945 (China)

Roberto Jiminez 12
Minister of Foreign Relations of Panama

13 - 16 Russian Delegates to United Nations meetings

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[illegible] Jr.

Anthony Eden 2

Halifax 3

[illegible] 4 May 28 '45

[illegible] 5 May 21 '45

Stuart Ross, No. 6

George [illegible] 7 May 28, 1945

[illegible], 6 June 1945 8

[illegible] Donald A. MacLean 6 June 1945 9

[illegible] 10

[illegible] June 14, 1945 (China) 11

Roberto Jiménez 12
Minister of Foreign Relations of Panama

[illegible] 13 USSR.

[illegible] 14 USSR

[illegible] 15 USSR

Rear admiral [illegible] 16
USSR N.

Harry Truman 1

Alben W. Barkley Nov. 8--1951

Charles A. Eaton - 2

Sol Bloom - 3

Myrtle Leonard 4 August 22, 1945

5 - 6 Russian Opera Stars

Tom Connally 7 U.S. Delegate

A. W. Vandenberg 8 U.S. Delegate

Virginia G. Gildersleeve 9 U.S. Delegate

Harold E. Stassen 10 U.S. Delegate

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Harry Truman 1

Alben W. Barkley Nov. 8-1951.

Charles A. Eaton - 2

Sol Bloom - 3

Myrtle Leonard 4 August 22-1948

Vyacheslav Mamontoffs (tenor) Rus. Op. Co.

Nadine Ray 6

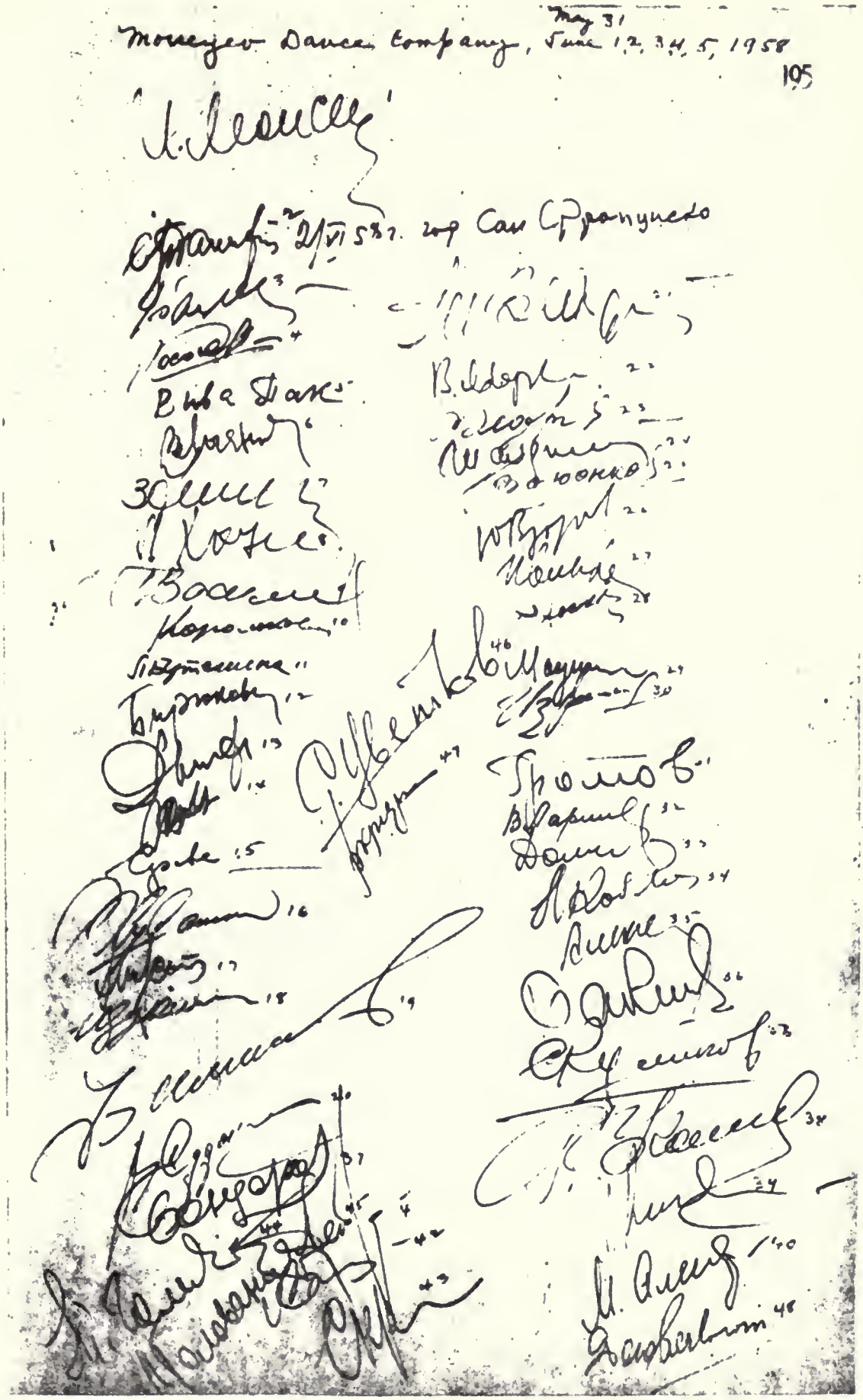
Tom Connally 7 U.S. Delegate

A.H. Vandenberg 8 U.S. Delegate

Virginia C. Gildersleeve 9 U.S. Delegate

Harold E Stassen 10 U.S. Delegate

The Moiseyev Dance Company, 1958



Riess: I get the feeling, Julian, that a lot of the stars coming out here would see you as their friend, but wouldn't want to get involved with too many of their critical peers.

Bagley: Yes, that happens, I think. They look forward to what I have to say about what they've done very often. Joan Sutherland is not a very close person. She is very far off. She's a kind enough person, but she doesn't gush over what you have to say about her performances like some of the others do. I think that Leontyne Price is that way. She appreciates your criticism and good will and thanks, but she doesn't go any further than that.

Riess: I guess that some stars are really just never sure that anybody really loves them or--

Bagley: Yes, I think so. They can't realize that it could be so sudden and so good; some of them are that way.

Riess: Do you think that if success comes so suddenly, you might even be more insecure?

Bagley: Yes, I think that that's a natural way for a person to feel and I think that singers are just like ordinary people when it comes to things of that sort.

The United Nations Conference on International Organization

Riess: In 1945, there was the great event of the United Nations Conference on International Organization.

Bagley: That was a very famous meeting because they had the whole opera house then. The San Francisco opera and the San Francisco symphony moved downtown on Bush Street, so they had the whole house. They had special guards to guard all the entrances and to keep people from coming in who were not invited or who didn't have cards. We had a great many people coming in who had just come for the meeting and we welcomed them. Everyone had to have a card to come in and to let them past the guards.

Bagley: The guards were everywhere in the opera house--in the dining room, upstairs, through the tunnel of the opera house. You can see that that would have handicapped the opera association because they were coming and going all the time. They just wanted you to come when you had a card to come to their meetings.

The entire first floor, which seats 1,300 people, was given over to the delegates and to a few very prominent visitors like senators and people of that sort. The press was admitted to the upper floor. A few sat downstairs, but most of them were in the upper floors. The television broadcasts of the meeting were done from the end boxes. They had the lights up there and they had the cameras there. That was very interesting. They went to many parts of the world, but I don't think that they went into Soviet Russia. We would see the broadcasts in person and then at night they took over the Alcazar theatre for those broadcasts. That's where we would go at night and sit with different friends who we had met at the meeting and look at the broadcasts. It was very interesting. It was a better way to see them than in person, it seemed to me, because the people behaved so well at those motion picture broadcasts. They were coming and going in the others and that made it a little difficult for you.

Riess: So, they spread out all over the house?

Bagley: As I said, the first floor was used for the delegates and the prominent visitors and the end box was used for the television cameras. H. V. Kaltenborn sat in the middle box and gave the news to the people outside. Upstairs, they had various kinds of visitors, some from the newspapers and some just ordinary.

Riess: And who would have been on stage?

Bagley: On stage was Alger Hiss. He was secretary general of the United Nations, you know. He was the man in the United Nations. A lot of people are just aware of his scandals. I don't know how much of that is true, but he says that in a few years from now, he will be a respected man. That was in the Chronicle this last week. He was a very likeable person and

Bagley: very attractive. Someone was out to get him and they dug up this scandal on him. It's very hard to be connected with a thing like that and to be a secretary of the United Nations.

But he was on the stage directing the proceedings. Very often they had meetings downstairs and he would be on the stage then, giving people a chance to talk.

Riess: Did the meetings go on every day from nine to five?

Bagley: Yes, they went on every day. They began at nine, but a lot of people didn't come back in the afternoon. They'd have a nine to twelve session and then they served lunch down in what is known as the barroom now. They had a lunch there every day and they had very good food. I ought to know, because I tasted a lot of the food that they served there.

Riess: How did they prepare the food?

Bagley: They prepared the food in the veterans' building next-door. The army did the cooking and the sailors worked behind the bar counter there dishing up the food. It was brought to the opera house from the veterans' building in a large truck. It came pretty close to noon and they began serving it. It went very well.

Riess: Was it cooked by the army at the Presidio or somewhere else?

Bagley: It was cooked by army cooks, but it wasn't cooked at the Presidio. It was cooked right in the veterans' building. They have fine facilities there. They have big ranges. I don't know what they have in the way of equipment, like baking pans and big kettles, but what they served was very, very good.

Riess: Did they try to make it kind of international?

Bagley: Yes, they had international food.

Riess: Was the seating for the lunches very special? Did important people sit together or did everybody mix together?

Bagley: Everybody mixed together. It was a very democratic gathering and I think that they tried to make it that way.

Riess: You got a lot of signatures from those important days. Stettinius was one of the names. Who was he?

Bagley: That's Edward Stettinius. He was secretary of state at that time and he was a very important man, of course, in the nation.

Riess: Did you perform any special favors or services for these people so that you got to know them well?

Bagley: Well, some of them wanted signatures or special help in the way that I would go at it. I took the people who were guards and special secret service workers all through the opera house beforehand. They were very kind to me and I got a lot of favors that I wouldn't have gotten if they didn't know who I was. Getting to the president [Eisenhower], for example, was one of the nice things that they did for me.

I helped them to get news. Certain ones wanted certain news and I helped them to get to the right places to get it.

Riess: But before the meetings started, you acquainted them with the opera house?

Bagley: Yes. I did that for the special guards who were taking care of the secret places in the opera house where someone might hide and shoot a president or shoot anybody else, for that matter.

Riess: Are there many of them?

Bagley: Oh, there are lots of places in the opera house where you could knock a person over with a gun.

Riess: Is the opera house checked even during regular performances?

Bagley: We check it for every performance, but not for that reason, because there are not too many people in that category shooting you or harming you in any way. They have nothing to gain by it.

Riess: But if political people came, like the Crown Prince and Princess of Denmark, did they do a lot of checking?

Bagley: Yes. They had a lot of secret service men there when the Crown Prince of Denmark came. We've had other people there who would cause us to hunt out special guards.

Riess: I suppose that that would have been true for Eisenhower or for any of the presidents when they were there. Who else might have gotten special guarding?

Bagley: Yes [that was true for the presidents]. The last Crown Prince of Japan was there and he came during a performance. He had special guards with him and they just brought him in at a certain time. The people who were sitting in the end box had the best position for seeing the house and I acquainted them [with the fact] beforehand that the Crown Prince was coming and that I might like to have him see the house from the end box. So, they were delighted to have him come and see the house from their boxes.

So, I took him to the end box and he saw the whole house. As you probably know, the Japanese were in attendance at this conference and they signed the book somewhere. They were very prominent in the meeting.

Riess: It sounds as if you sometimes gave tours of the opera house during intermissions.

Bagley: Yes. If special people had a special reason for seeing it, we very often broke some of the formal rules to accomodate them.

Riess: Carlos Romulo was another person who signed during the United Nations meeting.

Bagley: Carlos Romula was the president of the United Nations for a long time. He's a Filipino.

Riess: There is also the signature of a V. Molotov.

Bagley: Molotov was the one who gave us a lot of trouble in the early days of the United Nations because he disagreed with practically everything that was put

Bagley: before the United Nations. Even in the formative years, people would look forward to his talking and disagreeing with things. We always called him the "bad boy" of the United Nations.

Riess: So, I guess that when people went at night to see the televised proceedings, they would be cheering on some of their favorite people.

Bagley: Oh, yes. They applauded and it was just like a regular show with all the things they did.

Riess: I'd love it if you could tell me anything more about the events of those days. They were three different months for you because you didn't have your usual duties.

Bagley: Yes, I was free. I think that I listened to the United Nations more than the regular people because I was there. I stood through long, long sessions there and listened. There were some fascinating speakers there. Some I didn't understand. They talked in their own language and they had to be translated that first time. But recently when the United Nations has come, they've had little earphones that they've given us to put in our ears. They have a translator who translates the person who speaks into the various foreign languages, and that makes it very easy to follow what they are doing. You just put them at your ears and listen, and you hear the original and then you hear the translation from another booth. You can keep up with it very well that way.

In the beginning, they would just have someone who would stand up and translate and that was a long procedure. A man would talk for a half an hour and that would mean that the translator would talk for an hour, giving the two versions.

Riess: Was all the real work done behind the scenes, do you think? Or was it that the real decisions were actually being made right there?

Bagley: People must remember that that was a politically slanted organization and that a lot of the work was done behind the scenes. The rest came through to you in a regular way.

Riess: I heard that you were given a big souvenir from the United Nations meeting, the table that Stettinius had sat at. Elvin Fowler was telling me that you would serve dinners on this table after putting it together each time.*

Bagley: I don't quite remember this, but they might have given me a table for my office at the opera house. I'm sure that it's true if Elvin Fowler told you, because he knew a great deal about the U.N. meeting. But it may be something that I didn't consider very important and that I forgot.

Riess: He was also saying that you used to serve some good dinners on it.

Bagley: Well, I do have a table at home that they did use at the United Nations. I tell [people] very often that such-and-such a man sat here and that makes them feel very good.

Riess: You should have had the people autograph the table.

Bagley: [Laughter] Yes! Autographs are wonderful if you can get them in the right places.

Riess: How did you get Rachmaninoff's signature in the book?

Bagley: We took the book to Rachmaninoff at the St. Francis when he was visiting there. (He got out before we got hold of him.) So, Mr. Selby Oppenheimer, a very famous concert booker in the early days, arranged for me to take the book up to Rachmaninoff at the St. Francis Hotel. So, we got him [in the book] and that made our list of the very famous composers almost complete. As I said, we got Gershwin, Rachmaninoff and a lot of the later composers.

Riess: So, it wasn't that Rachmaninoff didn't want to sign--

Bagley: No, he just didn't have time. He was very gracious when I took the book up to him at the St. Francis.

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*Telephone conversation, July 17, 1972.

Bagley: He felt that he was highly honored.

Riess: It must have been strange to get back to business after the U.N. left.

Bagley: Yes, it was. I think that two people performed there when the U.N. was there, but they cancelled all of the other performances. I don't recall now who the two were, but they did appear on the opera house stage while the U.N. was there.

It was inconvenient to get in [then] and that's why the opera company moved out. They had to have passes to come in and they were stopped on all sorts of occasions when they had something important to do. So, they moved out before the United Nations came in, down to Bush Street, as I've already told you. They were free to come and go as they wanted to there and that made it very pleasant for them to be working under those conditions.

Riess: Were there special arrangements made for where the U.N. people were to stay when they came for the meeting?

Bagley: Oh, yes. Way ahead of time, they arranged for the various hotels in which they were to stay. They had a bus running from the opera house to the St. Francis, the Fairmont and the Mark Hopkins every five minutes or so and they took them back and forth.

The Fairmont, when I come out my back door, is just one minute from my house on Russian Hill, so I caught a bus coming down every morning at a certain time. It would bring me right down to the opera house. I had a card which allowed me to travel on the bus for free and that was a very great conveninece.

The Signature Book, to 1950

Riess: Ruth St. Denis danced in the fall of that year. Do you remember her?

Bagley: Oh, yes. Ruth St. Denis is a great dancer. She

Bagley: paved the way for American dancing in the early days. She was very good and she had a good following too.

Riess: Do you think that ballet is like opera, in that opera lovers would go to every opera, but with dance and ballet it might be different. Some people would go to the ballet and some people would just go to the modern dance.

Bagley: Oh, yes. They discriminated, especially the balletomanes. They like certain things in ballet and they will go to those ballets, whereas there are other ballets that they wouldn't think of going to. I think one of the great ballets with Margot Fonteyn is "Giselle." That's Carla Fracci's picture up there [points to picture] and she's a very good dancer in "Giselle." I would never miss that.

When I was in London, I had a chance to see "Lohengrin" by the Sadler Wells ballet, but I also noted that the Royal Festival Hall was having "Giselle" with the London ballet. So, I chose "Giselle" and I went to see that one night. With that, they were doing "La Beau Danube," which is a very fine ballet. So, I saw "Giselle" and "La Beau Danube" at the Royal Festival Hall.

That's a beautiful hall, as I believe I've already said. It's right across the river from Big Ben and they have wonderful eating facilities there and a wonderful view of the Thames River. It's an ideal size. I don't think that it seats more than about 2,000. They use it very often. They use it more often than our opera house is used. They have more performances there. Of course, London is a great deal larger than San Francisco and that makes the difference.

Riess: There is a signature from Leonora Wood Armsby which says, "To our Julian Bagley from Leonora Wood Armsby." Who is she?

Bagley: Mrs. Armsby was the president of the symphony association for many years. She is a very wonderful woman and she does wonderful work in getting funds for the symphony. She's a very good musician. She plays the piano very well. I think that she studied

Bagley: the piano in one of the cities abroad--I believe that it was Paris. Anyway, she's a very fine woman.

Riess: Would she have you take special people through for tours if she was trying to raise money?

Bagley: No, I don't recall that she did.

Riess: Did you have a uniform that you wore at the opera house?

Bagley: No, I didn't wear any uniform. I was just in my regular clothes. Some of the boys there who were attending the door and other parts of the house wear tuxedos, but I've never worn a tuxedo because it is rather uncomfortable and hard to get into and expensive to keep going.

Riess: In 1947, there were a couple of performances...The Nat King Cole Trio came and there were Duke Ellington and Stan Kenton.

Bagley: That was a jazz program. It was a good program. It's not the kind of music that usually comes to the opera house, but both of those people had big reputations and it was easy for them to get a good crowd.

Riess: Can you tell me any more about Nat King Cole or Duke Ellington?

Bagley: They both played regular programs and I talked with both of them. They were very agreeable and very fine in their music, although I don't care too much for that kind of music. Mine is opera and symphony.

Riess: Did they ask you about good places to go for jazz afterwards?

Bagley: No, they didn't. I guess that they knew about that from their connections here in San Francisco.

Riess: The "Friars' Frolic" was in 1948.

Bagley: That was a benefit performance, you know. You had a lot of very famous theatre men there, I think. Ronald Reagan was one of them. When he comes these days,

Bagley: he shakes hands with me and he comes from way across the aisle. He remembers me and I remember him from the old days when he was an actor. He was a good actor too.

Riess: George Burns, George Jessel, Al Jolson and Abbott and Costello were also there.

Bagley: George Jessel, as you know, is a comedian and singer. Al Jolson was there too and it was a very good show with all those people who came. It was a benefit performance and they did a good job.

Riess: 1950 was the year that Margot Fonteyn signed the book for the first time.

Bagley: Yes. She has been a very good friend of mine all the way through. I think I showed you the card on my desk from her. She missed me this time when she was here and someone told her that I was sick in the hospital and she sent me the card saying how much she had missed me.

She is a wonderful dancer. She is the peeress of all the dancers. In "Giselle" she is simply marvelous.

Riess: Did you watch the rehearsals of the dancers?

Bagley: No. I don't watch many rehearsals because I want to see the finished product. They stop and they talk [during the rehearsals] and I don't have time for too much of that, so I go right on with my work. Then, I go in a big way for the performance all the way through.

Riess: The year that she came, she was here with some other famous dancers like Moira Shearer.

Bagley: Moira Shearer was the one who got her fame through moving pictures. She was in a moving picture. I think that she was in "Red Shoes." That's where she got her fame. She is a very pretty girl and a very nice girl.

Riess: Were there any other dancers who you were particularly fond of who came to perform?

Julian Bagley working on a manuscript at his typewriter, February, 1973.

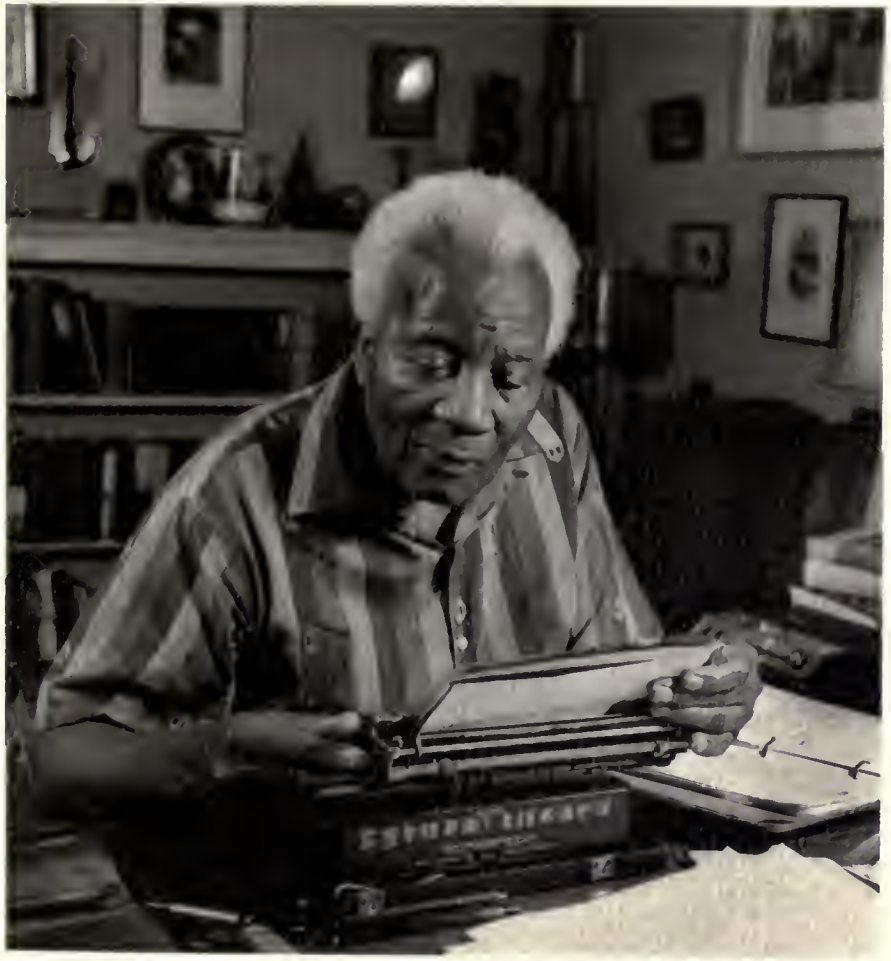
Julian Bagley holding photographs of Rudolf Nureyev and Carla Fracci.

Photographs by Cecil J. Thompson

Photographs by Cecil L. Thompson

Indian Basket Weights to Accompany Interview
with Carla Trasse.

Indian Basketry, 1943.
Indian Basket Weights or a manuscript by Jim Tyre-



Bagley: Carla Fracci was one and Margot Fonteyn, as I've said, was another. I guess that those were the two who stood out in my mind.

Riess: How about the men? Villela? Nureyev?

Bagley: Nureyev was simply marvelous. He goes up into the air and comes down like a bird. He is really something. He is very friendly with me too.

Margot Fonteyn and Nureyev would each come over to me when they finished dancing and give me a red carnation. I would always be backstage as soon as the curtain was lifted while they were taking their bows. I wear a red carnation every day when I am at the opera house, so that was a nice gesture.

Riess: I see that Rudolph Bing came to the opera house in 1950.

Bagley: Yes. That was shortly after he took charge of the Metropolitan.

Riess: So, I guess that you gave him your most thorough tour.

Bagley: Yes. He wanted to look at the stage particularly. Sometime before that, I let him see the front of the house. Then, I got his signature because his was a very important signature.

Riess: Are other opera company directors particularly interested in the mechanics of how the San Francisco opera house works?

Bagley: Well, we've had some [opera company directors] there. Most of the European stages are very complete in shifting the scenery. In Vienna, for example, you can have a whole set rolled back from the stage and they can change scenes very quickly because of that. Vienna is noted for that.

Riess: When Eddie Cantor came, he wrote down: "Here, at the opera house?"

Bagley: Yes. That means to say that he was just an ordinary singer and [to ask] what he should be doing at the

Bagley: opera house. But Eddie Cantor was a very good entertainer. He sang his own type of songs and the people who came came because he was there. He was very great.

Riess: You can see that a lot of people who signed were carried away by the idea of being at the opera house.

Bagley: Yes, they are, because we tried to show them [through the opera house] in a very thorough way and a very individual way. Now, for instance, Vienna takes people through the opera house, but oh, they take fifty or so at a time. And they talk to them from the stage point of view and they show them backstage, but its nothing like the individual tours that we give. We give them individual tours and we give them a chance to ask questions. We try to answer them in a way that would be helpful to them. In Vienna, they don't give you any chance to ask questions and they rush you through in a routine way, showing you certain parts of the stage.

I had a very thorough tour of the opera house in Warsaw, Poland. They did "Il Trovatore" while I was there, and that was a very fine experience. To see all of their house was something to be thankful for.

Riess: In your experiences with being taken on tours, did you ever meet anyone whose job had worked out as nicely as yours did.

Bagley: Well, I think that that would be so in Warsaw, Poland. The girl who took me around was a very good guide, and she was the author of a ballet book that was very good. She gave it to me, but I can't read any Polish, so it wasn't any good to me except for sight. The pictures that were in there I was able to see.

[Interview #4, July 21, 1972]

Negro Performers in San Francisco, Experiences, Audiences

Riess: When you came out to San Francisco in the 1920's, had you heard that there was less discrimination here?

Bagley: Yes, I had. It was in 1922, I guess [that I came out to San Francisco]. There was a great deal less here than there was in Los Angeles. I understand that Los Angeles has increased its liberalism, but in that time there was a great deal of discrimination in Los Angeles.

Riess: I know that you ended up working at the hotel, but when you were first looking for a job when you first came out, what were you after?

Bagley: The hotel [job] came pretty nearly after I got here. I wasn't without work in San Francisco very long. I went to the hotel, and then from the hotel, I went to the opera house.

Riess: Had you seen a "help wanted" ad for the hotel or how did you find it?

Bagley: No, I didn't. I don't recall specifically how I came to get the job. I think that I was living in the hotel, and the man thought that I was the best one to take charge when he was away. So, that's how it came about. I didn't ask him for the job; he asked me if he could give me the job.

Riess: When you came out, did you have some money saved?

Bagley: Yes, I had a good bit of money. I have always been

Bagley: very careful about that. I save a good deal of money from what I make. Now, for instance, I'm way above the charity level. I've got enough to take care of the bills that Medi-Care doesn't take care of without any inconvenience to anybody.

Riess: Despite the comforts of that job and that arrangement, can you recall any early discrimination?

Bagley: No, I don't. San Francisco was exceedingly liberal. Restaurants that I was particularly anxious about were open and free, when they weren't open in Los Angeles at that time. There was a great deal of difference between the two cities, and that's what endeared me to San Francisco because there wasn't any discrimination.

Riess: Did you visit Los Angeles first, looking for a job?

Bagley: Yes. I was in Los Angeles, but I didn't look for any job. I was just there on a tour.

Riess: When did your travelling start? Did you travel around the United States, for instance?

Bagley: Yes. I saw a good many of the cities in the United States, including Atlanta, which was considered one of the big cities of the South. I went there and I saw the schools there and I saw the town, the big streets and the little streets. I saw the Negro section, which was very prominent all over the United States. They had theatres and good restaurants and it was a nice place to be. But that was when I was there, much younger than when I came to San Francisco, and I wasn't looking for a job in Atlanta. I just was going to see the city, as I've gone to see other cities in America, out this way.

Riess: Did you ever think of going to New York for your--?

Bagley: No. I've been to New York on several visits, but I never wanted to live there or to work there. It was a town with too much hustle and bustle for me.

Riess: Did many of your friends from St. Nicholas, Florida get out?

Bagley: Yes. Quite a number of them that I know got out and went to New York and to other sections of the country. I have a friend who is a very wonderful lawyer in New York, Christopher C. Hall. He was born in St. Nicholas, as I was. He went to New York, went to law school, finished and set up practice in New York. He is doing very well now.

Riess: So you keep up with the old St. Nicholas people?

Bagley: Yes. They write to me quite often. Every now and then, I should say, perhaps, I get a letter from someone who has born and reared in St. Nicholas.

Riess: How about your family? Is there anybody left there?

Bagley: I have a sister and a nephew there, I guess. That's about all. The others are scattered about throughout the country. One nephew is married and lives in Los Angeles. I have a brother in Cleveland who was married and who just lost his wife. So, I guess they are scattered about in various sections of the country.

Riess: Do you feel close to them or have you lost contact with them?

Bagley: Yes, I feel pretty close to them. They write me often and I respond.

Riess: In the 1920's, what discrimination do you think that a black performing artist would experience in this country?

Bagley: In the South, it was the same thing as it was when I was there. There was a good bit of discrimination. They didn't have Negro artists in any section of the South.

Riess: How was it for someone like Marian Anderson, after she had made her success, to go back to the South?

Bagley: I think that Marian Anderson shunned those places, so far as I know. I don't know of her ever appearing in an out-and-out southern town. You know what a row there was about her appearing in Washington D.C.

Bagley: Just fifteen years ago they didn't want her to appear at a hall. They didn't rent it to her and the Park Department gave her a chance to sing at the Washington Monument, and a great crowd of people gathered there to hear her.

Riess: We've talked of the kinds of audiences for particular shows. Do black performers count on attracting a black audience?

Bagley: Not hardly. [Laughing] There's not enough of them. For instance, when an artist like Leontyne Price comes along, there should be enough [of a black audience] to fill the opera house. But, I should judge, offhand, that maybe a couple of hundred will come for a performance of that kind. And when she sings an opera, it's the same way; just a few people come.

Riess: Katherine Dunham is a friend of yours, isn't she?

Bagley: Yes. Katherine Dunham came and drew a good crowd, but not anything exceptional, not anything like some of the other famous dancers--like Nureyev would draw, for example.

Riess: But the fact that Katherine Dunham's dance troupe was doing primitive, African type things didn't draw a big--?

Bagley: No. That doesn't especially appeal to the Negroes in this country. They are interested in art, more or less, and it doesn't make any difference whether it is white art or black art.

Riess: I was reading this morning about Katherine Dunham. She was a remarkable woman. She started out as an anthropologist--

Bagley: Yes, she did. She went to Africa and studied anthropology there.

Riess: Did you get particularly acquainted with that group?

Bagley: Yes. Katherine Dunham came to my house for dinner when she was dancing at one of the hotels -- either the Mark Hopkins or the Fairmont. It was on Nob

Bagley: Hill, very close to where I live, and she and her whole troupe came there. In the hard days--I had two rooms at my house--in the hard days, some of them lived at my house for a while.

Riess: "In the hard days"--do you meant that they couldn't find hotel rooms?

Bagley: No, it wasn't hotel rooms. It was just that they had no engagements and they weren't making any money. So, this was a good thing for them to have somebody who was willing to give them a place free.

Riess: Tell me as much as you can remember about Katherine Dunham and her troupe.

Bagley: I went to her dances. She danced at various places in town that I went to, and then she finally came to the opera house. She was very popular there and she drew big crowds--not especially a great number of Negroes, but she had great success with the other people who filled the opera house. Her dancing was very exciting and they liked it very much.

Riess: What's become of her?

Bagley: I don't know. I haven't seen anything in the press about her recently, and that's the only way that I would be able to keep up with her. She hasn't danced at the opera house in years, and I imagine that she is semi-retired now. I couldn't say that definitely, but I haven't seen anything in the press about her recently, so it must be something of that sort.

Riess: Do you think that you might have been the only American Negro that some of the travelling companies ever met?

Bagley: Oh, no! They met many American Negroes here.

Riess: I mean that they got to know personally, though--

Bagley: Yes, I think so. I think so. I think that she met a lot of Negroes in New York, but not too many in San Francisco, because in those days, there weren't many Negroes in San Francisco.

Riess: I didn't mean to refer specifically to Katherine Dunham. I wondered if you might have been the only American Negro that a traveling company from another country, such as Russia, for example, might have met.

Bagley: In San Francisco, there certainly are more Russians than there are Negroes, and they have a great deal of loyalty to people who are coming out of Russia to present the Russian art to the American people. There is a big Russian colony in San Francisco and they go in for things like the Moiseyev dancers. They like that very much.

I haven't heard from the Moisevey dancers recently. I don't know where they are, but I used to hear from them years ago very often--three or four times a year. When they would come here, they would write and tell me what they were doing and where they were going. They've had great success since they left here. They've been in a big outdoor auditorium some place in Spain. They filled it and there were about ten thousand people there.

I guess that the Moiseyev is about the most famous of the troupes that are travelling. They have great success when they play here at the opera house. They fill the house with great success.

Riess: I've read quotes that say that your favorite of the performing arts is ballet.

Bagley: Yes. I like the ballet better than the others. It's so easy to take. You have to get a little bit educated to it before you can get along with it too well, but it's very wonderful when you get used to it.

Riess: Roland Hayes is another Negro performer who you may have special memories of.

Bagley: Yes, Roland Hayes sang there many tines. They gave a dinner for Roland Hayes and they invited me one place. I remember that he said something that was very wonderful. He said that it takes five things to make a thing a success, and that if someone has only four of them, then he won't be a success. He'll get along

Bagley: modestly, but to have a success, you must have those five ingredients that it takes to make a success.

I have always thought of that. It helped me a great deal, that saying of his. He was a very wonderful man, Roland Hayes. I'm sure that he is still living.

Riess: What were the five ingredients?

Bagley: Oh, they were whatever you were looking for. If you wanted to be a great singer and you had a great personality for acting, those qualities would help you immensely. But, if you didn't have a good voice, then you didn't go over.

Riess: Did you know Langston Hughes?

Bagley: Langston Hughes was a good friend of mine. He comes to see me every time he comes to San Francisco. The last time he was here, he left a note under my door saying that he had been there and that he was sorry that he had missed me.

He was a very good poet. He did some fine things in poetry.

Riess: Did he realize that you were interested in writing?

Bagley: I think that he knew that I was interested in writing. I'm sure he knew that I was writing, because I had written quite a number of pieces for the Negro magazines. I never wrote for the newspapers, but for the magazines. Opportunity, the Journal of Negro Life, gave me their first prize for one of my essays back in the early twenties, I think. The Crisis gave me honorable mention in one of their contests, and I have had a good many things published otherwise, including my book, Bodidalee, which I mentioned earlier.

Riess: When was your very first trip to Europe?

Bagley: I think that I went to Europe for the first time in 1969. I went by plane from San Francisco to New York and by plane from New York to Paris. The first time, I went directly from New York to Paris, and I spent all the time in Paris on my vacation.

Bagley: I lived in the student quarter. It was very nice there and very interesting. I met quite a number of people from different parts of the country.

Then, the next year, I went to different parts of Europe, including Vienna. I stopped in Vienna for the opera season, which begins almost religiously in Vienna on the first of September.

Riess: How did you know of places to stay?

Bagley: I always made my arrangements for staying before I left San Francisco through a regular travel agency. That's the best way to do it, I think. And I tried to get as close to downtown as possible because I was interested in the theatre.

Riess: The student quarter in Paris is unusual.

Bagley: The student quarter in Paris is very good, but I knew about that, of course, before I went to the agent and I told him that I wanted to stay in the student quarter. Things are comparatively cheap there, and that's a nice life, seeing all the young people who are so interested in so many things.

Riess: Had you been trying to get to Europe for many years before that?

Bagley: No. I had thought about it, but the matter was saving enough money to have a chance to go there in as much luxury as possible. So, I took the plane, as I said already, and then I went to several places on the train. One year, I took the train from Paris to Rome. That was a very beautiful ride with lots of wonderful scenery. You go into Switzerland--you change steps, I think, in Lausanne and you drop the diner there. You get a chance to see a good bit of Switzerland, going through the country on the train. You don't get very much in that way from an airplane.

Before I took sick, I was all prepared to go to Denmark, Norway and Sweden. As I told you before, a very good friend of mine is the secretary of the royal opera house in Copenhagen, and she wanted me to come and see the opera house there. I said earlier in the

Bagley: interview that she had been my guest through Mrs. Alma de Brettville Spreckels, and she was going to return the favor to me if I had been able to get there. She writes me two or three times a year, and always, of course, at Christmas time. I was looking forward with great pleasure to seeing her.

I also wanted to see Copenhagen. They say that it is such a beautiful city and that the people are so kind there. That made a great impression on me.

The Old Days Out Front at the Opera House

Riess: I know that you remember Mrs. Spreckels, but I was wondering if you could tell me any memories you might have about some of the other patrons.

Bagley: There were some other very good patrons. Mrs. Nion Tucker is one of them. She is very friendly and very helpful to the opera association. Mrs. Stanley Powell, whose father was one of the first presidents of the opera association, is still living. She is a wonderful woman, very friendly and a very hard worker still for the opera association.

There are one or two others who have been equally as grand in the affairs of things there. The Fleishhackers are good; they have helped a lot. Before she died, Mrs. Sigmund Stern was a very great worker. She came to all the meetings and helped to raise all kinds of money. She was a very gallant person. What I liked about Mrs. Stern was that she loved opera. I saw her leave the opera only once before it was over. She always stayed until the end.

Riess: So you could see people leave if they left before the opera was over. Did they look a little sheepish?

Bagley: No, they didn't. They didn't care too much to have it known that they had gone out, though. They wanted to make it known that they had stayed for the whole opera.

Riess: Probably your first contact with many of these people might have been through the chauffeured car-calling system.

Bagley: Oh, yes. We used to flash numbers on an electric switchboard in the opera house. We gave them [the patrons] numbers and the police officers were very, very helpful then. They came and they gave out the tickets to the patrons, and then the patrons would deliver them to me as they wanted to go. Then, I would flash the red signals behind the opera house and near the veterans building, and almost at Commerce High School. We had three different signal boards where the cars were parked and those are the three places where we flashed them.

That was very good. I liked that very much and I think that it was better the old way than now, when they have them come in as they wish and pile up one upon the other. Besides, that looked very ritzy to have your number called. And I don't know any other place that has [that system]. I've been to the opera in Paris, Rome, Milan--at the great La Scala--Russia and Warsaw. But I don't know any place that has anything like a signal. Of course, they might have had them earlier. All those opera houses that I have mentioned are very old, and it might have been that the signal system was done away with as it has been done away with here.

Riess: You had to have chauffeurs to have the system, didn't you?

Bagley: Yes, you had to have a chauffeur. A great many of the people who come to our opera, of course, have chauffers. It looks very elegant when they are arriving. There is nothing like it in the world, as far as I have been able to see.

In Vienna, the first night looks like just an ordinary night. I went to the first night in Vienna last year, and there wasn't anything ritzy about the crowd that arrived by car. I've seen other places, but not first nights, in Paris, Leningrad and Warsaw, but none of them have the great showing that we used to have here.

Riess: People must have dressed very grandly.

Bagley: Yes, they did. They dressed beautifully, the countesses

Bagley: and princesses. There was one princess who used to come dressed very beautifully. Occasionally, we had famous moving picture stars in the house, and the fact that they were there was passed around to different people in the audience and to people outside. We always knew them when they came out.

Riess: Do you think that famous people like to be recognized?

Bagley: Oh, I'm sure that they do. That's almost human nature. They like that very much.

Riess: If they didn't want to be noticed, would they perhaps come to you and ask you to help make sure that they weren't?

Bagley: I don't think that they would do that. They want to be noticed. That's part of the reason that they are there, to give them a certain kind of publicity.

Our Governor Reagan has been there several times, and he's always broken the line to come over and shake hands with me. Then, he sits in the box, where he is very prominent. And all of those things help to make it known that they are there. Then, the audience begins whispering that so-and-so is here, you know. They like to feel that they are the first ones in on it. They do that quite often.

Riess: They can rent the binoculars at the opera house, too.

Bagley: Yes. Binoculars are about the only thing that we sell at the opera house. We sell the rental of those binoculars. In the other opera houses, they sell everything. They sell the programs. In Paris, they don't give you anything. They also sell the programs and when people take you to your seat, you have to tip them. That's something that is unheard of in America. We don't sell any programs and we don't tip anybody who takes people to their seats. That's very good, I think.

Riess: In addition to getting their cars at night, what other things might you have done for members of the audience?

Bagley: Chauffeurs would bring in lost articles or articles

Bagley: that were left in the cars, such as binoculars. They would bring them to me and I would check on the seat that the person was sitting in. Most of the people were in the boxes and I would take the articles up to them.

Riess: Did you ever visit or work in any of the homes of these San Francisco people?

Bagley: No, I never worked in their homes. I've seen several of their very wonderful homes. Mrs. Sigmund Stern, who is long dead, had a very wonderful home with very wonderful pictures and paintings there. Mrs. Koshland had an organ built right into her house which was very wonderful. There are one or two others that I have seen, but those were the two most impressive ones. I remember them very well.

Riess: I wonder if anyone who recognized your great virtues might have tried to hire you away from the opera house when you were there?

Bagley: No, I don't think that they did. I think that they found out long ago that it would be useless to try to hire me away from the opera house because I liked that better than any job that I have ever had. I liked the atmosphere and I liked the people who came. It was very pleasant. A person was fortunate to get into a place like that where there is so much going on and where there is so much beauty exhibited. The house is beautiful, the scenery is beautiful and the operas are beautiful.

Riess: Do you think that there is something a little bit beautiful about audiences when they get all excited?

Bagley: Yes, there is, because they are not mad. They are all pleased. It's very reasonable that they should be [excited] and it's such a nice thing to see an audience like that. They always tell me when they like a thing, and I am a sort of a runner to the different productions. If people like it, they don't fail to tell me, but if something is bad and they don't like it, they also tell me. Then I tell that to the right person so that they won't make that mistake again.

Riess: Were you ever aware of any romances going on behind the scenes of the opera?

Bagley: Well, they always said that Pinza was a great lover and that he was in love with this one or that one. That made it very fascinating to see him walk around backstage during rehearsals.

Riess: Do you mean that "this one or that one" would be there with him?

Bagley: Yes. But they all were members of the opera company. They weren't outsiders at all. Outsiders don't have very much chance in those things backstage. They are confined to someone who is playing with them, you know.

Riess: How about the dancers? Were there any backstage romances there?

Bagley: No, I don't think so. The dancers are pretty steady in their romance, and that gives them a chance to keep out of all kinds of scandals.

Frank Lloyd Wright's Visit

Riess: One of the opera house's visitors I wanted to ask you about was Frank Lloyd Wright.

Bagley: Oh, I'm glad that you asked me about him because he was a very wonderful man! He was a great architect, of course, but he was an avante garde architect and he had great disdain for people who were not, or at least architects who were not, seeing things as he did.

I took Frank Lloyd Wright through the opera house once. I wanted him to see it completely, so I took him all around, backstage and to the upper parts of the house. And when I got him to the final point where I thought that I was going to sell him on the opera house, that was the end box. A woman had come with him--I don't know who she was--but when she got there with us to that end box, she said to

Bagley: Frank Lloyd Wright, "Now, what do you think of this?" And Frank Lloyd Wright said, "I think that anybody who would do a thing like this is dangerous to the community."

Of course, that was just like a slap in my face because I had always liked Mr. Arthur Brown, Jr.'s work. He did the city hall with another man and he did the opera house and the veterans building. I think that he did some buildings in Pasadena, but I'm not too sure about that. But, anyhow, he had done enough up here for me to be Arthur Brown, Jr.'s fan! And that just knocked me in the face. But, nevertheless, I kept cool. I said nothing about it.

Mr. Wright said, "You're interested in things, I see. Would you like to come and hear me talk tonight?" I said that I would be delighted to, so he said that he would leave a ticket at the box office for me. He was lecturing to a San Francisco audience at a hall on Mason Street--I think it was the Native Sons Hall--at any rate, that's where he lectured. In his first few remarks, he bawled the people out about the ugliness of that building, so I didn't feel quite so bad after he had done that. The house was sold out, of course. As many people as could get ticekts were there.

When I went to the box office and asked if there was a ticket there for Julian Bagley, they said that they were sold out. I said that Mr. Wright said that he was going to leave a ticket for me, so they looked over their racks and saw a ticket there for me. The people who were standing there waiting to get tickets were surprised to know that there was a ticket left for me there and that they could buy none. That made me feel quite important. It was a very nice lecture and I enjoyed it very much.

He has lectured here in San Francisco since then, and they have sold out the place. He has lectured over at the University of California and they have sold out the place. He is very famous as an architect. But I don't particularly like that avante garde sort of architecture. It may be all right, but I more or less like the buildings that have a lot of fancy work about them, like the ones you see in Paris and Vienna and in the other European cities.

Riess: When was he here?

Bagley: I don't recall the year that he was here, but it seems to me that it was about 25 years ago. It was when the opera house was pretty new and I think that it was at least 20 years ago that he was here.

Riess: Did any other architects come to the opera house?

Bagley: We've had a lot of architects. One of them, Richard Ehernberger, is a great friend of mine now. He came to the house and he liked it very much. I showed him through and I became a good friend of his.

Riess: Were there any other world-renowned architects on tour who you would have showed the place to?

Bagley: We had some from Europe who I don't particularly remember, but they would probably come into the realm of world famousness.

Riess: But no one as opinionated as Frank Lloyd Wright?

Bagley: No. No one was that rude. I've shown some of the Italian architects through who are more or less avante garde. They took the opera house for what it was worth.

The Signature Book, to the Present

Riess: Now we're up to the 1950's in the autograph book. In 1951, the Sadlers Wells ballet came.

Bagley: Yes. That was before we had the famous London ballet, and that was a great treat to all of us.

Riess: Then there was Victoria de los Angeles.

Bagley: She was a famous opera singer. She signed the book and was a great success there. A very beautiful woman she is. She is still singing.

Riess: I told you that my husband felt like running away to follow one beautiful opera star and her name was Elizabeth Schwarzkopf.

Bagley: Oh, yes. She is very beautiful. She is blonde and she has a beautiful singing voice. She is a fine woman and I like her very much.

Riess: Lowell Thomas also came.

Bagley: Yes. He was a broadcaster and he broadcast a very good program from the opera house.

Riess: And Danny Kaye was also there. He seems like a friendly chap. Did you have any particular contact with him?

Bagley: Not too much. Danny Kaye is a comedian and everything is funny with him. He pleased the audience very much.

Riess: Do you think that when comedians are offstage that everything is still as funny?

Bagley: Well, they don't seem at all as funny as they seem on the stage. They seem to be perfectly normal people.

Riess: Two conductors of the symphony signed the book that year, Enrique Jorda and Georg Szell.

Bagley: Yes, they were both conductors. Enrique Jorda was our conductor here in San Francisco for some time, and Georg Szell was the conductor of the Cleveland orchestra. He just died a little while ago. Georg Szell is a good conductor.

Riess: What do you think that the greatest years of the symphony were in terms of good conductors?

Bagley: It seems to me that Pierre Monteux was the greatest of all the conductors. He had a way of doing things that people liked and he had a very great following. He was a wonderful conductor.

Riess: The New York City ballet came that year, and two of the stars then were Tanaquil le Clerc and Jacques d'Amboise.

Bagley: Yes. Jacques d'Amboise is having great success in New York. He danced on television several times

Bagley: and he is still a great star in the New York City ballet. He is a good dancer.

Riess: He and Edward Villela are people who are making an effort to show that ballet has a place in it for "real men."

Bagley: Yes. I think that they are very successful. D'Amboise has had great success that way.

Riess: Before recently, what was thought of male dancers by the audiences?

Bagley: Well, I think that that is just jealousy, more or less, of the men when they try to put out those rumors because most male dancers are exceedingly good-looking. They are kind of off to themselves and that doesn't please the average person. But I think that they do things much like other people would do them.

Riess: Well, I think that the United States has been very slow to understand dance.

Bagley: Yes. It's a great art, and an art that must have a lot of understanding about it. They [the dancers] usually read good books and are well informed about things of that sort. That makes them really interesting to talk with.

Riess: In 1953, Liberace appeared.

Bagley: Oh, Liberace played the piano, and, of course, he was very popular on the radio. So, he drew a big crowd and the people liked him immensely. And he's a nice man too, a nice man to meet, a very kind man, very outgoing to the public.

Riess: Was his piano all decked-out with candles and that sort of thing?

Bagley: Well, he had the candles on his piano. He never appeared, as I understand it, without the candles on the piano.

Riess: In 1954, Edmund Hillary and the people who climbed Mr. Everest came.

Bagley: I don't remember too much about them, but they lectured, of course.

Riess: Would you have attended the lectures as well as the opera performances?

Bagley: Oh, yes! I went to everything, to every performance that they had. I never missed a performance at the opera house until I came here to the hospital. That's fifty years of theatre-going. Everything!

Riess: In 1955, Ed Sullivan signed the book and said, "Hi, Julian!"

Bagley: Yes, I remember Ed Sullivan. He was very popular on the radio then and he gave a broadcast once a week. He came to San Francisco and broadcast from the opera house once. He was a very nice man and I like him very much. He has given us a chance to hear a great many things that we wouldn't hear otherwise. Dancers have been on his program and great singers and great comedians. They all please the people very much.

Riess: How come he said, "Hi, Julian!"? Did he know you especially?

Bagley: Well, he knew me, of course, and had heard a lot about me and he just wanted to let me know that he knew me, I think, more than anything else.

Riess: And in 1955, you got the signature from Dwight Eisenhower.

Bagley: Yes. He was here for the United Nations tenth anniversary meeting.

Riess: And you also had the signature of John Foster Dulles. Was he a difficult man to get to?

Bagley: No, he was easy to get to. Of course, they want all the publicity that they can get for themselves in those sort of things, and you come right through to them.

Riess: I was wondering if the people who signed the book liked to thumb through it to see who else had signed it?

Bagley: Some of them do. Quite a number of them go right through it and find all the other famous people who have been there before them. They do that. It would be more or less somebody who had a little time on his hands and who would be willing to go through it with you and you'd comment on them. I commented on them, telling what they did and what they said when they were here, very much as I am commenting today.

Riess: 1956 was the year that Leontyne Price signed.

Bagley: Yes, she had her debut that year with the opera company. She is a very wonderful artist and a very wonderful person.

Riess: Would you have talked with her about some of the experiences of discrimination that we mentioned earlier?

Bagley: Yes, we would go over experiences that she had had and that I had had and how things have changed. Both of us were very close to those things.

Riess: Glenn Gould also came in 1956.

Bagley: Yes. Glenn Gould was the famous French pianist. He did a marvelous job. He played beautifully and I don't think that anybody plays Bach like he plays it.

Riess: Did you get a chance to watch him rehearse?

Bagley: I watched him from the audience when he was playing for the audience.

Riess: I've heard that he rehearsed with his gloves on or something like that.

Bagley: I have heard people say that, but I think that people make up lots of tales about Glenn Gould. My memory of him is of the wonderful way that he played the piano--Bach and things like that. He offered me a job to come and be his secretary because he liked me so well, but he was a person who would insult people and who wouldn't do the things that you asked him to do. I felt that it wouldn't be any good for me to

Bagley: start on that career so late in life, and when I told him that I wouldn't and when I laughed, he said, "I'm serious--I'm serious!" But that's as far as I got with Glenn Gould. [laughter]

Riess: I guess that you didn't want to live with all that temperment.

Bagley: No. And I had had enough of travelling that sort of way, because you don't see things when you are travelling that way. You see things only when you are travelling free, with nobody to hinder you. You go where you want to and see what you want to much better that way.

Riess: In 1957, Count Basie and the Birdland Stars came.

Bagley: Yes. I got Count Basie's signature, but I had just a rippling of a conversation with him. Not much.

Riess: Sarah Vaughn and Billy Eckstein were two of his stars.

Bagley: Yes. I got both of them. I had a little chat with them, but it wasn't anything of importance. Otherwise, I would have remembered it.

Riess: 1957 was an anniversary for the opera association--twenty-five years. You have a signature from Robert Watt Miller.

Bagley: Mr. Miller was the president of our opera association. He's no longer alive now, but he signed the book for us that year. He was a wonderful man and he did some wonderful things for the opera. He was very alert about how things were done. He was backstage most of the time, watching what was going on back there and correcting things that weren't right or that he thought were not right. He was very valuable to the whole organization.

He was a musician too; I understand that he played the organ very well. I never heard him play it, but they said that he played the organ very well. And that would make him closer to the opera association, knowing music.

Riess: Had he been involved with the opera from the very beginning?

Bagley: Yes. He was involved from the very beginning. He was the president when the opera association gave its first performance of "Tosca" in the opera house. Mr. Robert Bentley was the first president and he died just a little before they opened. He was also the president of California Packing, I think it was. They make the Del Monte foods. He was a very wonderful man and his children are so good too.

Riess: William Crocker then signed under Mr. Miller.

Bagley: Mr. Crocker was a very wonderful man for the opera association. He helped in so many ways, in music and in art. He was well up on those things and he gave liberally to the opera association. He attended the meetings that they had and he was a very important man in the opera association.

Riess: Robert Watt Miller's comment was: "The first twenty-five years are the hardest," and then Mr. Crocker wrote underneath that: "My first year - the hardest."

Bagley: Yes. That was the first year that he was on the board.

Riess: In 1958, Marcel Marceau came.

Bagley: Oh, yes. He was a French comedian and he was very good. The people liked him very much, although I think that the opera house is a little big for a thing like that. They are used to playing in theatres that seat not many more than a thousand. He is a great comedian, though.

Riess: Carl Sandburg came in 1959.

Bagley: Carl Sandburg appeared with the symphony and he read Lincoln's poem. He was a very wonderful reader. I hadn't heard anybody that did it as well as he did it. Carl Sandburg was just wonderful. I often tell people about him and say how wonderful he was. He knew just when to pause and when to emphasize a particular word and it came through to you. And

Bagley: that is something to do in a big house like ours: That's really an immense house for that sort of thing.

Riess: I talked with him and he said, "Look at him! That beautiful flower that he's got on!" I had on my red carnation.

Riess: Mary Costa also signed the book. Was that her debut?

Bagley: Yes, it was her debut. She came here with Leonard Bernstein's play, and she signed the book then for the first time. She was a very beautiful girl and a very wonderful actress. She's just gotten a musical contract with a moving picture company. She is going to do a movie and I'm sure that that will boost her a lot. She's already well on her way, and that certainly should get her to the highest point.

Riess: Is there great excitement in the audience when someone is making a debut?

Bagley: Well, it depends on how much they have heard about the person. If they have heard a lot about the person, then they respond. Right after the fame has come to the singer, they go after it in a big way.

Riess: You said that sometimes you would help the autograph hunters get an autograph from somebody. What kind of people are after autographs? For instance, Mrs. Nion Tucker and Mrs. Spreckels wouldn't care much about that, would they?

Bagley: Well, I think that if they'd get autographs, it would be because the singers would send them records of what they made without their having to go backstage for them. If any of those people wanted to go backstage, we would arrange it so that they could go backstage.

And then there were other collectors--just ordinary people off the street who make it a business of collecting autographs and who make it a business of buying the particular record that that star has made. We always try to get them back to see the stars, because the stars like that. It's good for them and it is good for the person who is looking for the autograph. So, we have several people who

Bagley: go back with records to be signed by various artists who have appeared.

Riess: Some people hope to make a business of it, I guess, since you can sell autographs of certain stars.

Bagley: Yes. I imagine that some people do. But the people who come to the opera house are not that sort of people. They are people who are after real value and they go to get the autograph because they think that it is important historically. It gives them the feeling that they have met the artist.

Riess: Pablo Casals came in 1960.

Bagley: Yes. He had gone into composing then. We played one of his pieces, an "Oratorio," and that was the last time that he was at the opera house. I think that that was the only time. But, anyhow, he signed the book at that time. He was a very gracious man. I met him and I talked with him. I went up to his box during the intermission and continued the conversation. We had a very beautiful record of things that he had done.

Riess: Did he approve of the performance of his work?

Bagley: Yes, he liked that very much. It was a very good performance.

Riess: Two opera stars also signed--Marilyn Horne and Anna Moffo.

Bagley: Yes. Both of them are very good. Anna Moffo was good and Marilyn Horne was especially good. She is one of the great singers of the future, I imagine. She has made her mark already, but I think that there is a lot more coming from her as time goes on. She is a beautiful woman and has a beautiful voice. She is a good actress too.

Riess: I think that for a long time, and that maybe still, people have acted as if it didn't matter what you looked like as long as you could sing.

Bagley: Yes. That was true of most of the singers. It's glorious work that they have done. Some of them were

Bagley: very large, and they got by, because they had wonderful voices.

Riess: But it is nice when somebody is good looking--

Bagley: Yes. All the way around. Lily Pons was such a good example of that. In "Rigoletto," for example, she looked like a little doll. She was so good in that.

Riess: In 1961, Joseph Krips conducted the San Francisco symphony.

Bagley: I think that that was probably his debut.

Riess: Ozawa did his first guest conducting in 1962.

Bagley: Yes. Ozawa made a big hit because he conducted the symphony that year and he played "Symphony Fantastique." You know that that composition lends itself to a great deal of movement. Ozawa moved a lot--like a dancer--and that was very unusual to us because a great many of us remember Monteux's conducting "Symphony Fantastique" and Monteux didn't move any at all. So, it's amazing how different people can get effects by different approaches.

Riess: And if you had listened to it without seeing the conductor, it would have really sounded different too, you mean?

Bagley: Yes.

Riess: Nureyev's signature appears in 1964. Was he here with Fonteyn then?

Bagley: I think that Nureyev always came with a company. I don't remember him any other way. He was a very wonderful dancer. He is just the right size and his movements are wonderful. He's a good dancer.

Riess: Then there's Andre Watts.

Bagley: Andre Watts is a young pianist, a very good pianist. He's wonderful. He's rehearsing all the time, not with the orchestra, but without the orchestra. He comes in and rehearses and he gets his effect that way. And his mother is so nice. She is such a nice

Bagley: woman and I always look forward to seeing her every year. She told me, "I don't go everywhere with him, but I always come to San Francisco when he plays there." And I thought that that was a very great compliment to us, to the orchestra and also to the city.

Riess: Grace Bumbry was here also.

Bagley: Grace Bumbry was a great contralto, an operatic contralto. She sings a great deal here in San Francisco, in New York, and in London, where she sings with the Covent Garden. She is a regular member of that organization. She has done very well.

It would be surprising to know that they gave a birthday party for Lotte Lehmann out in the Legion of Honor. They invited me to come and I got a program today that I had from that concert. Grace Bumbry was just starting then, and I wrote on my program that I thought she was a sort of black Callas, she was so good. And she lived up to that prediction. I could usually tell which way they were going, and I wrote that down on the program.

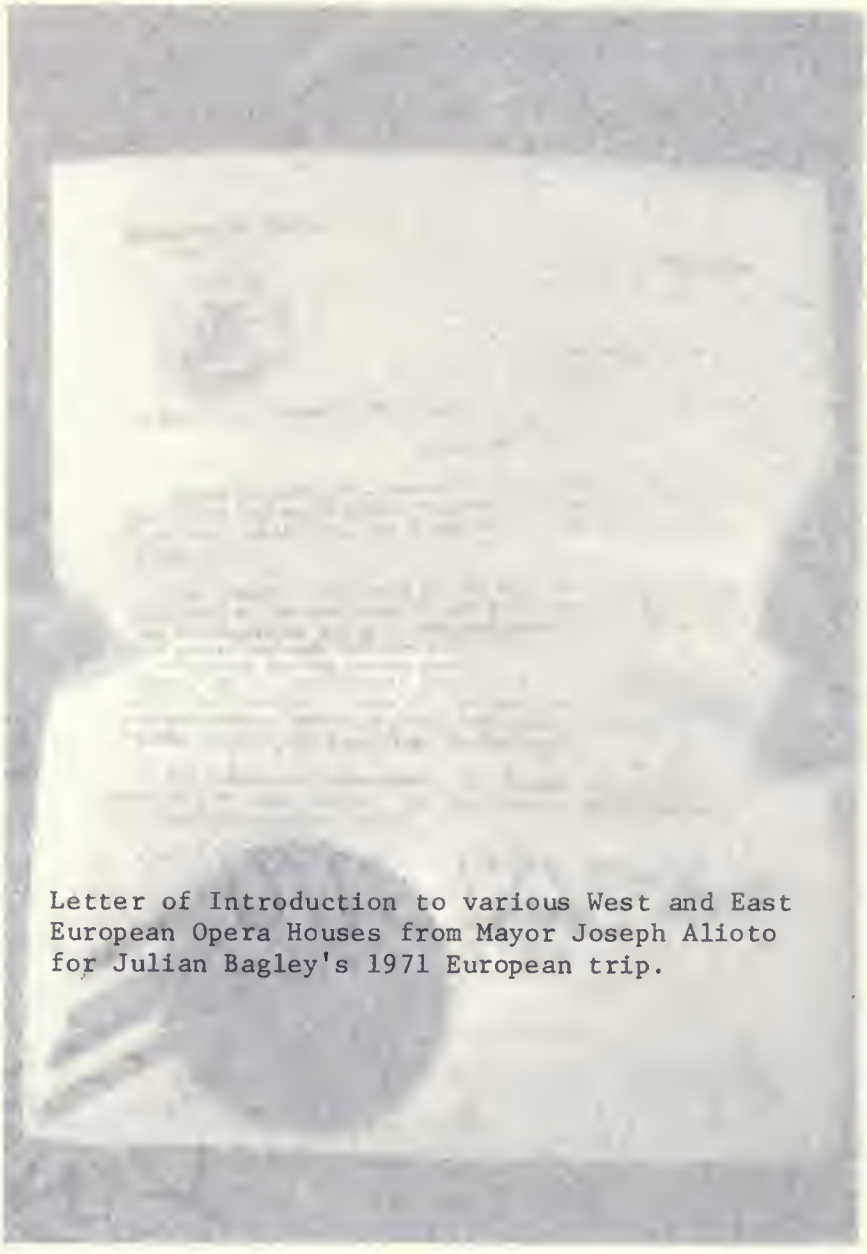
Riess: What about Lotte Lehmann--

Bagley: Oh, Lotte Lehmann was a wonderful person! She did so many things beautifully. In "Der Rosenkavalier," she was just marvelous. That was one of the greatest things that she did. I liked her personally, too. She was a very friendly person, always working. So, you had to give her a chance to go her way on work.

Riess: In 1967 you can tell that we're coming into the modern times because Karl Stockhausen was here.

Bagley: Oh, yes. He was a very modern young fellow and he was so serious that he looked almost mad to me. But he had done some wonderful things and he knew where he was going.

Riess: My favorite signature in the book was a big messy signature that I finally deciphered, "Ravi Shankar," the sitar player.



Letter of Introduction to various West and East European Opera Houses from Mayor Joseph Alioto for Julian Bagley's 1971 European trip.

Photograph by Cecil J. Thompson

Letter of Introduction to various West and East
European Opera Houses from Mayor Joseph Alioto
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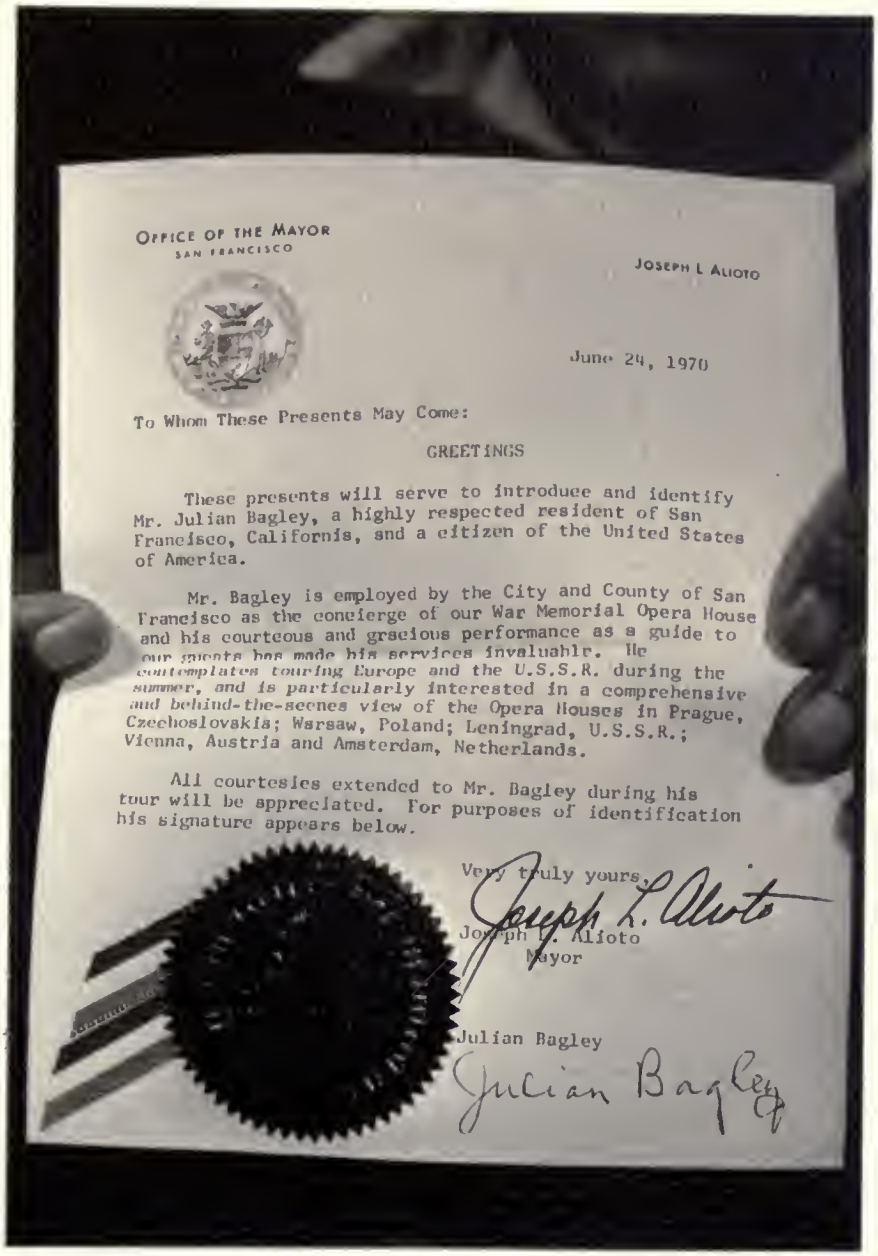


OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
SAN FRANCISCO

JOSEPH L ALIOTO

June 24, 1970

To Whom These Presents May Come:

GREETINGS

These presents will serve to introduce and identify Mr. Julian Bagley, a highly respected resident of San Francisco, California, and a citizen of the United States of America.

Mr. Bagley is employed by the City and County of San Francisco as the concierge of our War Memorial Opera House and his courteous and gracious performance as a guide to our guests has made his services invaluable. He contemplates touring Europe and the U.S.S.R. during the summer, and is particularly interested in a comprehensive and behind-the-scenes view of the Opera Houses in Prague, Czechoslovakia; Warsaw, Poland; Leningrad, U.S.S.R.; Vienna, Austria and Amsterdam, Netherlands.

All courtesies extended to Mr. Bagley during his tour will be appreciated. For purposes of identification his signature appears below.

Very truly yours,

Joseph L. Alioto

Joseph L. Alioto
Mayor

Julian Bagley

Julian Bagley

Bagley: Well, I didn't go through them that closely. I was just so anxious to get them, that I didn't think too much about what was the most interesting signature. Some of them I can't read. If I didn't know who it was, I wouldn't be able to read it.

Riess: A lot of the musicians signed with a little scribble of music too.

Bagley: Yes. And some of them even wrote whole paragraphs of music. It was usually their own music and that was how they could immortalize themselves.

Riess: In 1969, Coretta Scott King came.

Bagley: Yes. She was Martin Luther King's wife. She came and the moving pictures had cameras there to take pictures of her. She signed the book, of course, and I talked a little bit with her. That was very interesting. She is a very serious woman and she means to do the very best that she can.

Riess: She performed something called "The Lincoln Portrait."

Bagley: Yes. That was the same one that Carl Sandburg had done.

Riess: I'd like to give you a chance to sum up anything you might like to say.

Bagley: Well, to sum up my experiences, I would say that it has been a great life. I don't know any other place that would have given me as much pleasure as the opera house did. I met great people there, great composers, great singers, three presidents. It was just wonderful to be in an atmosphere like that.

Riess: You're a lucky man.

Bagley: It was luck, sheer luck!

Transcriber: Marilyn White
Final Typist: Gloria Dolan

APPENDICES

A. "A Birthday Celebration Honoring Julian Bagley on his 80th Birthday."

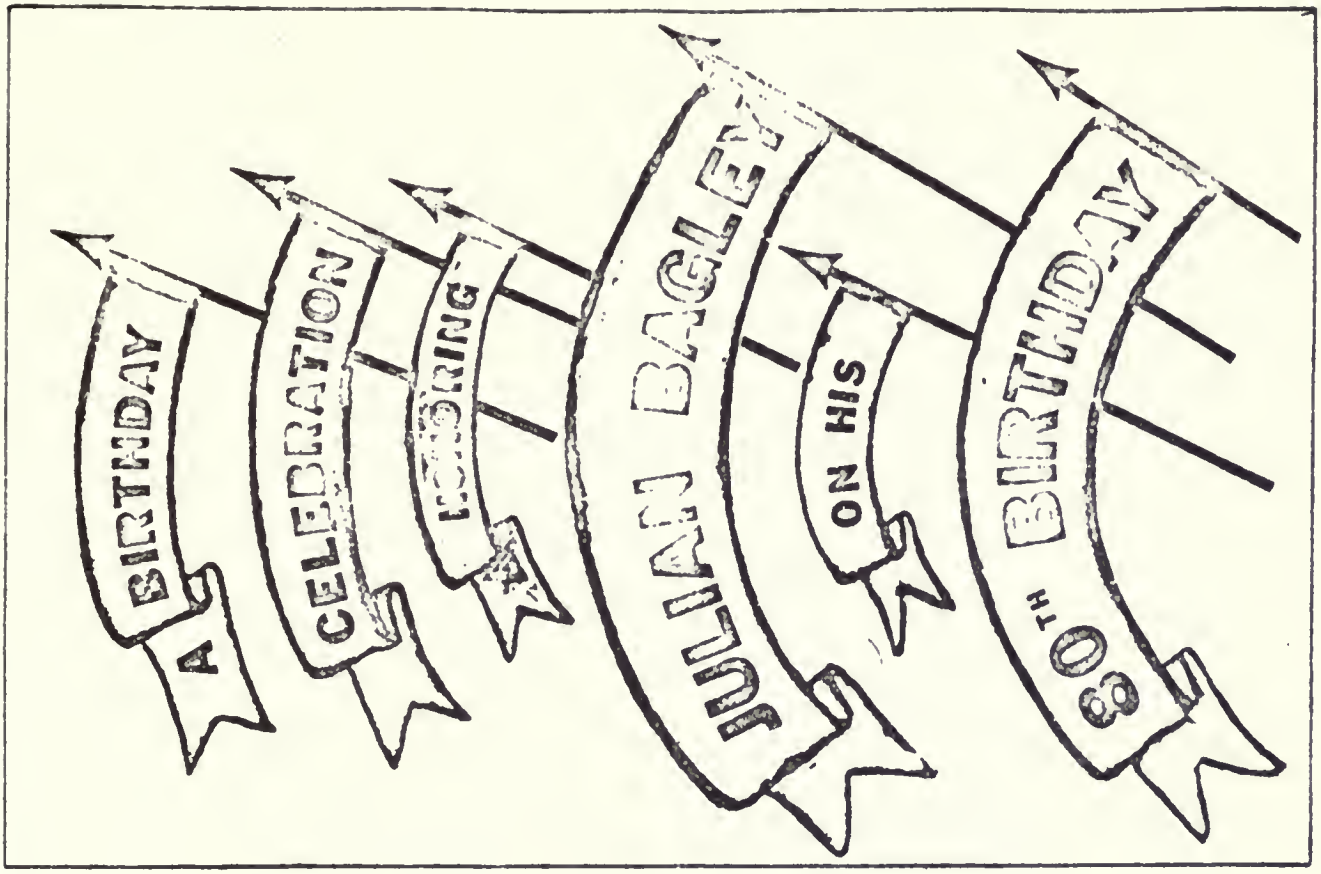
B. "Candle-Lighting Time for Julian Bagley," Jacksonville Times-Union and Journal, January 23, 1972.

C. "Bodidalee One Could Do Anything," San Francisco Examiner and Chronicle, November 7, 1971.

D. "Introduction," by Julian Bagley, from Candle-Lighting Time in Bodidalee.

E. The Unofficial Host of the Opera House, San Francisco Chronicle, October 23, 1966.

F. "Julian Reveals Fascinating Life," San Francisco Opera Notes, June 1959.


A BIRTHDAY
CELEBRATION
HONORING
JULIAN BAGLEY
ON HIS
80TH BIRTHDAY

P R O G R A M M E

Family Group Photo.....Julian and his friends

Buffet

DIVERTISSEMENTS

Folk Song.....JO-JO

Flamenco Dance.....CRUZ LUNA ENSEMBLE
(Courtesy of THE CASBAH)

"La Colunnia".....NICOLAS MASSENKOFF
(Il Barbieri di Siviglia)

"Infelice".....NICOLAS MASSENKOFF
(Ernani)

Pas de Deux.....GIOIA PAVIN and JOHN LOSHMAN
(Romeo and Juliet)
Choreography by John Pasqualetti

"Non Piu Andrai".....NICOLAS MASSENKOFF

****

Toast to Julian

Cake

N.B. Upon entering, please sign Julian's birthday card which is in the library

(Programme subject to Change)

M E N U

Barbecue Spare Ribs

Buttered Yam Puree with Orange-Pineapple Sauce

"Grand"et Pettit Pois with Baby Onions

(Armenian Dish)

Salad

Julian's Birthday Cake

****

Special Acknowledgements

Dr. Roy Leeper.....HOST
Mrs. Bali.....BALI'S RESTAURANT
Mrs. Inez Terzian.....Salad
Ms. Barbara Fritz.....Salad
Gioia Pavin.....Pacific Ballet
John Loshman.....Pacific Ballet
Barbara Ehrenbergor.....Name Tags
Cruz Luna Ensemble.....THE CASHAH
JO-JO.....Folk Song
Nocolas Massenkoff.....Operatic Arias
Crown Zellerbach Corp.....Paper Napkins

"Thank you one and all for help making this evening possible"

Cecil Thompson

A. 98

Candle-Lighting Time For Julian Bagley

JULIAN BAGLEY learned folk tales and folk-dancing in South Jacksonville, but he now is an author and opera house guide in San Francisco.

Candle Time in Bodidalee

18 Folk Tales Featuring Bonzo Bear and Many Animal Friends from Bodidalee

by Julian Bagley

Illustrated By Wallace Tripp

Times-Union and Journal
Sunday, January 23, 1972

By ELAINE KENT
Times-Union Staff Writer

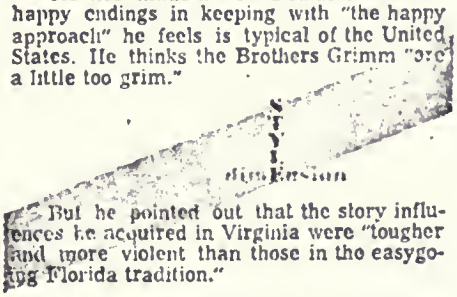
IT has been a 60-year journey for Julian Bagley from his days as a teenager in Jacksonville to his present status as author of a new book of folk tales, "Candle-Lighting Time in Bodidalee."

Born in St. Nicholas, Fla., which is now a part of South Jacksonville, Bagley explained that inspiration for his book came from the African-origin stories he heard in Jacksonville when he was as young as 10 years old and later when he was an agricultural agent working with black Virginia farmers.

Opera Is Job And Hobby

Bagley conducts tours at the War Memorial Opera House in San Francisco, where he has not missed a performance since the opera house opened in 1932. During time off from his work he has visited opera houses and churches throughout the world and has taught himself to read French, Spanish and Italian. "One of the sad things in Russia was to see the very beautiful cathedrals that have been taken away from the people and turned into museums," said Bagley.

He has made his 18 "Bodidalee" stories happy endings in keeping with "the happy approach" he feels is typical of the United States. He thinks the Brothers Grimm "are a little too grim."



But he pointed out that the story influences he acquired in Virginia were "tougher and more violent than those in the easygoing Florida tradition."

SOME STORIES such as "The Right Drumstick" had more than one version, according to Bagley. He explained that in Florida the story was told almost exactly as it is in his book — with animals such as Wiley Wolf and Randy Rabbit all trying to figure out how to get the drumstick off the turkey, an honor which will give the lucky fellow the right to do the calling at the corn dance. But in Virginia, Bagley explained the black persons had a differing version which had to do with Negro slaves trying to slip a drumstick from the white master's table.

All his characters are animal creatures not unlike those in the "Uncle Remus" tales although Bagley has made his stories simple by avoiding all ethnic dialect. Like the "Uncle Wiggly" tales some children remember, each story flows into the next, and the characters are just as prone to break into verse as were Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland" people.

FOR example, when Alister Crocodile is courting Miss Gator, she points out to him in no uncertain terms:

"He's as different from Beau Gator
As an orange from a 'tater!
Different! Different! Different!"

Bagley loved the "Uncle Remus" stories, but he has never read any of Lewis Carroll's work or the "Uncle Wiggly" stories. His favorite character from his own book is Little Papa Pig, because it was from the sale of a pig he raised that he first was able to go away to school at Hampton (Va.) Institute, where he began writing for the school newspaper and magazine.

Once Worked In Shipyards

While in Jacksonville he worked in the shipyards for a while, as did his father (his father originally was a worker on the property of the Armstrongs, a wealthy St. Nicholas area family), and also was a student at Florida Baptist Academy, going to school each day by ferry. He remembers one of the teachers, Annabelle Hawkins, who he said "was really the one who encouraged me to go away to Hampton Institute to school."

After graduating from Hampton, he worked four years with the Department of Agriculture, then moved to San Francisco in 1922, where he managed a hotel for 10 years. The children of the hotel owner, then toddlers, now in their forties but still come to visit Bagley two or three times a year.

SINCE THE PUBLICATION came out, people have been coming to the opera with their copies for him to autograph — one teacher brought 13 copies which her students had bought. He also got in the mail some favorable reviews, such as the one in the Dec. 4 "New Yorker," and a little girl from North Palm Beach, Fla., sent him a thank-you letter and her photograph.

Bagley said eight stores in San Francisco are selling the book and that it is selling at the University of California at Berkeley.

"Bretano's, the biggest book store in town, gave me an autographing party, and that day more than 100 of my books were sold, and the store was very happy about the success of the party."

THE "Bodidalee" book, published by American Heritage Press at $4.95 a copy, is Bagley's first book, but he has published a number of stories in magazines. "Bodidalee", he explained, is any place in the imagination of the reader, but he also created a fictitious Florida town, Coidlow, as the setting for a story, "The Unlettered Day," published in "The New York Outlook" in 1919. Another story, his first ever published, was "Dancing into Freedom," having to do with an African slave who gained his freedom in a dancing contest.

Bagley first learned to dance in Jacksonville, later finding that the dancers were among his favorite performers and friends at the opera. Street dancing was the rule in old St. Nicholas, according to Bagley, who recalled, "If one couldn't dance or ride a bicycle, he wasn't considered much of a boy." Most of the dances of the animals in "Bodidalee" were ones he dreamed up especially for the book.

Right now Bagley has in his mind a book for adults and also another for children, but he explained, "Things come to you, and you get them down on paper, and it sometimes works out better than you thought . . . and sometimes not."

Times-Union and Journal, Jacksonville
Sunday, January 23, 1972

Former Classmate Recalls School Days with Bagley

Just back in Jacksonville for two years after teaching kindergarten for 45 years in Neptune, N.J., Miss Julia Neil found out within the past few weeks that her oldest friend, Julian Bagley, has published a book of folk tales, "Candle-Lighting Time in Bodidalee."

MISS NEIL, 75, has known Bagley for 60 years, having gone to school with him at the Florida Baptist Academy, a private school for black boys and girls. This academy stood at the corner of Lorne (now East 5th) and Harrison streets, bordered on another side by Franklin Street. The Baptist school, located on the exact spot where Matthew-Gilbert Junior High now stands, graduated Miss Neil in the class of 1913.

"He has developed educationally, and so have I," said Miss Neil, who has not seen Bagley for 40 years but has corresponded with him all this time. She denied that she and Bagley were sweethearts — in fact, he was dating another girl when she met him.

However, neither Miss Neil nor Bagley ever married. Miss Neil said she never married because of her burning desire to get an education.

YOUNGEST CHILD and only daughter of an Americus, Ga., country schoolmaster, Miss Neil was sent to the Florida Baptist Academy to get the best education her parents could afford to give their daughter. Two of Julia's brothers had died as babies, and the other two had "headed for New York" as soon as they were old enough.

Miss Neil later went to Spellman Institute in Atlanta, Rutgers University in New Brunswick, N. J., New York University, Trenton (N.J.) Normal School and eventually got a master of arts degree in kindergarten education from Columbia University in New York. She financed her own education most of the time, teaching while going to school part time.

She remembers that Nathan W. Collier was principal when she graduated, and she remembers him as "so elegant, a humanitarian, loved people and got along with people. He didn't rule you by beating you." Indications are that the Florida Baptist Academy was founded around 1896, as that is the first year it appears in Webb's Jacksonville City Directory.

THE CURRENT assistant principal of Matthew-Gilbert, James E. Thompson, remembers playing among the ruins of the old academy when he was at school at Franklin Street Elementary on the same spot. Later the elementary school became Matthew-Gilbert, which first was a junior high, later added senior high grades and now is a junior high again.

Thompson's mother, the late Mrs. Erlinn W. Thompson (maiden name Ruth Vaught), attended Florida Baptist Academy and Spellman at the same time Miss Neil did and later married the first black pharmacist in Jacksonville. The oldest living graduate of the old academy, Mrs. Ruth Graham, lives within a few blocks of Matthew-Gilbert, where Nathaniel Davis is the principal.

"Education meant so much more to me that I never married," said Miss Neil, "but if I get a chance now, I'm gonna!"

She admitted, "I didn't make such hot marks in school, but I got by. I worked hard all my life, but I always tried not to burn the candle at both ends. I had sense enough to rest. Work doesn't hurt you, but you've got to know how to handle it."

MISS NEIL taught for two years at the Florida Baptist Academy after her own graduation there and participated in the move of the school to St. Augustine, where it then was called St. Augustine Industrial Institute. Later the school moved to Miami, and Miss Neil does not know what it is called now or if it still exists.

Her education in the North was made possible in part, she revealed, because she lived with a white friend, Mrs. Hattie Rosenstein of Deal, N. J., for 26 years while teaching school, working at other jobs and going to school.

She taught kindergarten 45 years at Ridge Avenue School in Neptune, N.J., and retired four years ago. Before moving to Jacksonville, she lived in Asbury Park, N. J.

In Bodidalee One Could Do Anything

By Helene Rivers

OFFSTAGE during a recent rehearsal of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" the children in the cast looked through a new American Heritage Press book for young readers, "Candle-Lighting Time in Bodidalee," and admired the lively illustrations of sassy Randy Rabbit, sly Fonee Fox and all the others.

[illegible] cisco's Julian Bagley, Opera House concierge, friend of the performing greats and visiting dignitaries. "They just didn't have time in their busy schedule to do more than that," he said with a gentle smile, a red carnation neatly tucked in his coat lapel, as he relaxed in the press room lined with the photographs of many of the major artists who had performed in the Opera House since the "Tosca" of 1932, and whose signatures filled the famous guest book on the desk. (The most recent entry at the time of this interview was that of Steuart Bedford, Conductor and Chief of Music Staff of the British Week performances.)

"I read to the children a few of the paragraphs," Julian Bagley continued, "then each wanted a book to take back home to England, although I think it will soon be coming out over there and might now be available in Canada. And they are right about the illustrations; Wallace Tripp is an artist who loves to draw animals, and I think he is in the running for a major award."

"Bodidalee" is an excellent example of how an author and illustrator of a children's book successfully complement each other. The sketches dance with a vitality also expressed in the telling of the 18 folk tales that make up Julian Bagley's book. He first heard them from family members and friends when he was growing up around the turn of the century in the town of St. Nicholas, Florida, (now a part of Jacksonville). Then later after his graduation from Hampton Institute, and working as an agriculturist, he collected more tales and different versions from the black farmers in Virginia. They were passed on down from one Negro generation to the next, much in the manner of the folk tales that the Grimm Brothers collected in the loosely-scattered German provinces over a century ago and brought into world literature. The Grimms' book was one of his favorites, although he admits some of the stories were a bit too grim for him.

Close to the Soil

The tales that Julian Bagley heard had their origins in Africa, from people close to the soil, "who knew what the animals were saying," and so the characters naturally took on the forms of animals. In the most recent retelling, and with the vivid imagination of children Africa was replaced by "Bodidalee", that "here - there - almost everywhere place," that very special place where the young Bagley and his Florida friends "could do anything."

"With our imagination we could fly away into space. We could skip over high waves in the sea. We could burrow through the earth like ground moles plowing through ink-black soil in the middle of the night . . . Yes, indeed, we could do anything at all."

'THE DANCE OF BUBBER BABOON'

There have been other writers over the years who had discovered that timeless storyland of "the everlasting now" in childhood.

Beatrix Potter wrote of it as "a sand-bank at the foot of a magnificent fir." Kate Greenaway described it as "a wide grassy place in a shady lane with a high hedge." And Thornton Burgess whose animals closely suggest the traits of the "Bodidalee" characters, although Julian Bagley had not been influenced by the Burgess nature-book series of the Twenties, located it "beside Laughing Brook in the Green Meadows."

Julian Bagley placed "Bodidalee" along the banks of a river high in The Forest. And in this setting his Rabbit, Fox, Tortoise, Bear and all the other personalities become involved in a variety of adventurous episodes — tender, suspenseful, mischievous and hilarious. Each tale is a classic, embellished by the author with his own creative ability, and to a great degree each is reflective of his impressionable early experiences and present love for the cultural arts.

As a child he and his friends had to know how to dance; dance competitions on the streets and on the back porches were a part of their lives. And as they grew older, the contests remained an important pastime. Many Negroes continued into the old vaudeville world and competed among themselves backstage, always with the idea of bettering their performances.

Julian Bagley's first published work, a short story in a 1917 or 1918 edition of the now defunct magazine, "The Southern Worker," was based on such an incident. Titled "Dancing Into Freedom," it told of the story of an old slave who danced so well against another contestant that he gained his freedom:

This competitive theme is present in many of the "Bodidalee stories ("The Great Fishbowl Contest," "Faster Than Thunder," "The Big Bamboo Boat Race," to mention a few). It also appears in the most delightful story, "The Dance of Bubber Baboon," which joyously reflects more than a pride in competition; it reveals a love for his favorite of all the performing arts, the ballet:

plunged into The Big Blue Lake. And Bubber Baboon came up dancing. . . . And he was dancing on old Bean Gator's back! And he danced and danced and danced. . . . And he'd spin around like a top, tipping old Bean Gator this way and that way, and flinging the rippling waters of the Big Blue Lake in every direction, even away up on the slopes where the watchers sat."

"The dance," he said, "is full of life and imagination, one can make anything out of it that one wants to." He has similar feelings about the symphony (his second interest), for there one can imagine pictures from the music, he said. But opera, he considered the most confining of the three cultural interests he is associated with.

"Opera keeps one's feet in a box," he said.

Nevertheless, he has never missed a performance at the Opera House, and on his several trips abroad he has visited as many of the opera houses as was possible, as well as a number of art galleries. His greatest admiration was for the Hermitage in Leningrad, and he prefers it to the Louvre because of the light and the brightness of its gold and white neo-Greek style. He has a talent for languages; he can read French, Spanish and Italian. It was through his knowledge of French that he first learned from a headline in France that a leading ballerina of the Leningrad Kirov Ballet, Natalie Makarova, had defected to the West on Sept. 4, 1970.

A First Book

"Bodidalee" is Julian Bagley's first published book. He has no immediate plans for a second children's story. He would prefer to write for adults.

Nor has he any great desire to write anything aimed at redressing long-standing social injustices.

"It's not easy to do in a story," he said. "One way, though," he reflected, "would be to touch on the integration in schools, stress the goodness in all children and in all teachers who are making a sincere effort to offer their greatest capacities in teaching and helping others."

The ideal book for children, he decided, should be rich in imagination, but this is difficult because of the great and recent changes and the take-over of the machines. "Tremendous, fast flights are now a reality, and so many of the imaginary Jules Verne adventures have been realized. What's left?", he asked.

Then he thoughtfully added:

"It's hard to write something imaginary any more. But, if you still can (and Julian Bagley has done so in "Bodidalee"), you will have children understanding, or at least considering, your message."

Candle-Lighting Time in Bodidalee
American Heritage Press, 1971

Introduction

A long time ago, in my native Florida, we young ones had a nice-sounding word that we loved to play around with. The nice-sounding word was *Bodidalee.*

Now there were many reasons why we enjoyed playing around with this word. But I think the one *big* reason was because it fitted so softly into our stories, sayings, and rhymes. To tell the truth, playing with it in such ways was like having a great big room full of building blocks with which we could make a marvelous little dream road to some faraway land of enchantment. Often we proclaimed, "She danced out her shoes all the way to Bodidalee!"

"Gone to Bodidalee. I mean really gone!"

Sometimes we even made up limping little rhymes about this imaginary place.

Where's Bodidalee,
Tell me, dear—
Is it far,
Or is it near?
Is it big—
Or is it small,
Or is it just a name to call?

Then some quick thinker among us, sitting in the house or picking oranges in the orange groves or walking along a dusty road—or maybe even fishing from a bateau on the river—would holler back,

Bodidalee big?—Bodidalee small?
Bodidalee's just a name to call!
Where's Bodidalee? Listen, dear,
Bodidalee's here, Bodidalee's there—
Bodidalee's almost everywhere!

Then there were the stories that the old folks had brought a long, long time ago from faraway Africa. My, how we did love to listen to and then retell these stories! But in retelling them, where do you suppose we said we had heard them? Why, in Bodidalee, of course. For in that here-there-almost-everywhere place we were tied down with no strings. With our imagination we could fly away into space. We could skip over high waves in the sea. We could burrow through the earth like ground moles plowing through ink-black soil in the middle of the night. Yes, indeed. In Bodidalee we could do anything. Anything at all.

Thus, although the Bodidalee of these little stories is down South in my native Florida, it could just as well be a Bodidalee of your own imagination, or away off somewhere like high up in the hills of New Hampshire. Or by the waters of Lake Michigan. Or far out in the Golden West, where the mountains run down to the sea. Or it could even be farther away, in Africa, where so many stories are told, and where the ones in this little book originated.

Yes, indeed. Believe me, Bodidalee can be anywhere. Anywhere at all.

Julian Bagley
Russian Hill
San Francisco,
California.

The Unofficial Host of the Opera House

This World, Sunday, October 23, 1966

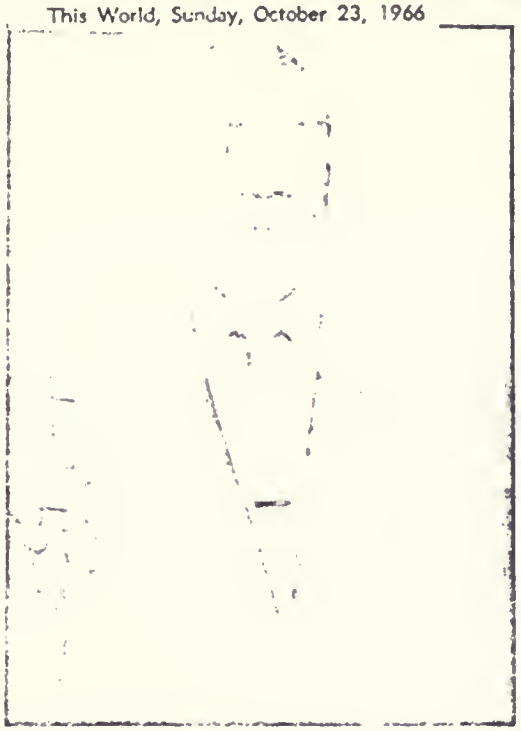
By Blake Green

JULIAN BAGLEY, a gray-haired and slightly stooped "attendant" at the War Memorial Opera House, is an unassuming man who has a phenomenal knowledge of the performing arts, acquired, in part, by attending every performance at the Opera House since "Tosca" opened on October of 1932.

But his job, which could have been nothing more than that of handy man and custodian, has evolved to include guide, historian, critic-in-residence and interpreter for foreign stars and dignitaries. Attired in black tuxedo and red carnation, he is the unofficial greeting committee of one at the Carriage Entrance where recognition by his beaming smile is a mark of prestige.

Almost as if he fears creating an erroneous impression, Julian is quick to spell out his position: "So it won't be confused with 'intendant.' An intendant is a very important position in a German opera. And I don't consider my position important at all."

This is left to others to judge.



JULIAN BAGLEY

A Bit of Credit

In his role as guide Julian should certainly be given a bit of credit for impressing his almost mystical appreciation for Arthur Brown's design of the 19th Century Italian Renaissance opera house upon the architects from other cities whom he has led along its marble-covered floors.

So convincing has he been that some are said to have used the design of the structure as a guidepost for buildings in Los Angeles, Seattle, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto, Montreal and, by next year, Winnipeg.

In every case, except Los Angeles, Julian has followed through his "conferences" with the architects by spending his vacations visiting the finished products. He was invited to Seattle for the opening night performance of the new building there.

Perhaps the most difficult critic he has encountered was the controversial Frank Lloyd Wright who, when led into the first box of the Golden Horseshoe during a tour by Julian, surveyed the cavernous room and bellowed, "The man who would design a house like this is dangerous to the community."

Julian's lack of success at altering the great man's opinion became less of a burden, however, when that evening he accompanied the architect to a lecture across town and heard him criticize that building, too.

Signature Collection

AS CUSTODIAN of the City guest book Julian made his initial contacts with the artists and lecturers who have appeared at the Opera House over the years.

His collection of signatures includes composers, directors, singers, musicians, ballet dancers, philosophers, authors, statesmen, diplomats and Presidents of the United States.

Julian, who has a penchant for orderliness, has designed his own classifications for his autograph collection.

His three categories: "Transit — the ones who are famous at the moment" (perhaps like Liberace who executed his signature complete with a grand piano sketch); "creators who will last indefinitely" — like Leonard Bernstein, Rachmaninoff, Thomas Mann"; and "the organizers of the UN" and those who have come back to celebrate its anniversaries.

In addition to his collection of the scrawls of the greats and the near-greats, Julian has memories of personal experiences shared with many of the artists.

Dame Margot Fonteyn, after noticing his ever-present red carnation, has never failed to present him with a red rose from her bouquets.

Rudolf Nureyev talked with him in his dressing room about the ballet "Le Spectre de la Rose."

"He said that he never danced it because it was too old-fashioned — and I argued that nothing that beautiful could ever be old-fashioned.

"But later, when I told Sir Frederick Ashton (the artistic director and chief choreographer of the Royal Ballet) about his remark, he said that Nureyev didn't want to be compared with Nijinsky in his greatest role."

Bruno Walter discussed with him Mahler's "Resurrection Symphony."

"After I told him that I thought it was greater than Beethoven's Ninth, the noted classical interpreter "put his finger to his lips and said 'sh-h-h, you mustn't let anyone hear, but I think you're right.'"

The Listener

The knowledge and obvious love of the arts that Julian brings to his discussions have been gained during the long hours of listening from his position at the rear of the theater. "I always stand," he said. "It keeps me more alert."

Also, he will tell you shyly, fingering his carnation, that he's a student. He reads a lot, including art magazines from all over the world which come to the Opera House, often making it necessary for him to rely upon his self-taught rudimentary knowledge of French, Spanish and Italian. "And I listen," he said, "when the performers talk to me at their leisure."

A fellow member of the Opera House staff attributes Julian's knowledge to an "amazing memory" which includes an almost uncanny ability to be able to recall the exact scene or character in almost any production.

Ballet is Julian's favorite of the performing arts, followed closely by symphony and opera, but he also enjoys the songs of Frank Sinatra and Pearl Bailey.

He doesn't hesitate in offering his critique of a performer, and he recognizes his own lack of musical talent.

"I played the trombone in my Florida high school band," he said, "but I was terrible."

San Francisco Opera Notes
June, 1959

Student, Critic and Philosopher

JULIAN REVEALS FASCINATING LIFE

Julian Bagley's official job at the War Memorial Opera House, where he has worked since the theater opened in 1932, is listed as "attendant." But unofficially he is a backstage historian, tour guide, philosopher, interpreter and critic.

Julian has been custodian of the theater's Guest Book (an official duty) since the day Gaetano Merola started a tradition by writing his name at the top of the first page. That was in 1936, and Julian has been recording signatures of famous visitors to the building ever since. His list includes three presidents—Hoover, Truman and Eisenhower—and a legion of scientists, statesmen, and other VIP's.

Cherished Signatures

It is not surprising, though, that two of Julian's most cherished signatures belong to opera composers.

"Creative genius should be respected most of all," he said during a recent interview, pointing to the names of Sir William Walton ("Troilus and Cressida") and Italo Montemezzi ("L'Amore Dei Tre Re"). Julian's admiration also goes out to the great singers whose names are preserved in the aging brown book: Lily Pons, Lawrence Tibbett, Lucrezia Bori, Lauritz Melchior, Lotte Lehmann, Beniamino Gigli, Ezio Pinza and Kirsten Flagstad.

"Pinza Superb"

The last two are his favorites. "Pinza was superb," Julian said, and his dark eyes glistened. "He sang with such ease, as if he were talking to you. Nobody could touch him."

On the subject of Mme. Flagstad, Julian is equally emphatic. "I consider her performances here in 'Parsifal' and 'Tristan und Isolde' to be among the finest experiences of my life," he stated.

Nobody who knows Julian will question his intelligent musical judgment. He has attended every opera performance ever staged at the Opera House and, to make this feat even more remarkable, he has never sat for a single performance.

"I am more alert standing," he explains. "And I can applaud better that way, too."

Aside from his rapt attention and fervent applause, Julian has another trademark at the opera. He wears a red carnation in his buttonhole to each performance. Without it, he says, "I would feel unclothed."

On the matter of "artistic temperament," Julian dishes out another portion of quiet wisdom.

"There have been very few opera stars here who can be classed as truly 'temperamental.' These people have worked long and hard to get to the top. They just can't be bothered with such a thing as 'temperament'!"

Julian, a qualified judge of opera, is also the undisputed connoisseur of food props used in each performance.

Delicious Props

"These props are all very realistic," he assures the skeptics. "In fact they're delicious."

Julian should know. For many years he has been the sole heir to all edibles that appear on stage. His favorite is the baked chicken from the banquet feast of Don Giovanni, but he is also full of praise for the beef stew in "Louise," the fruit from Tosca's supper, and the French bread and salami from the banquet in "La Boheme."

And he just can't get enough of the "wonderful Russian bread" that is passed around in "Boris Godunov."

But Julian's greatest nourishment comes not from food but from books. "I am a student," he says, with characteristic humility.

His reading has included Verdi's letters, Wagner's scores, architectural treatises and writings on mysticism. He has taught himself French, Italian and Spanish, and devours newspaper and magazine articles on opera written in these languages. His linguistic ability has also been of immense practical value, for Julian is frequently confronted by opera people who can't speak a word of English.

Talks with Wright

His interest in architecture once led him into a discussion with the late Frank Lloyd Wright, whom he escorted through the opera house. A moment that Julian will always remember came after the tour, when the famous architect invited him to be his personal guest at a lecture he was giving that evening.

Julian is optimistic about the future of opera, which he describes with one word—"bright." In his calm, philosophical way he is visibly excited about the coming season.

When asked which opera he favored in the 1959 repertoire, the veteran attendant of the War Memorial Opera House answered without pause.

"Don Giovanni," he said. "It is the finest opera ever written." Then he added, with a gentle grin, "With or without the baked chicken."

INDEX -- Julian Bagley

Suzanne Bassett Riess

Grew up in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Graduated from Goucher College with a B.A. in English in 1957. Post-graduate work at the University of London and the University of California, Berkeley, in English and art history.

Feature writing and assistant woman's page editor, Bethlehem, Pa., Globe-Times. Free-lance writing and editing in Berkeley and volunteer work on starting a new Berkeley newspaper.

Editor in Regional Oral History Office since 1960, interviewing in the fields of art, cultural history, environmental design, photography, and University history.