

[Carr: A room full of treasury memories](#)

[Howie Carr](#) Wednesday, June 29, 2016



**Credit: Patrick Whittemore**

Former President of the Massachusetts Senate William Bulger, left, Massachusetts Treasurer and Receiver General Deborah B. Goldberg and Robert Crane, front, entertain attendees at a testimonial on Crane's behalf at the State House on Tuesday, June 28, 2016.

Staff photo by Patrick Whittemore.



The guest of honor was 90 years old, in a wheelchair, and he seemed so happy to be back in his old office at the State House, where he was first sworn in as a state rep from Brighton back in 1957.

“I was only here for two days,” former state treasurer Robert Q. Crane recalled with a big grin for his friends yesterday,

“and I said to myself, ‘This is the place for me!’ ”

They dedicated a conference room in Crane’s honor yesterday, and what’s left of the old gang paid their respects — Billy Bulger, Mike Dukakis, Frank Bellotti, John Driscoll. The old gang that’s gone — their children came by to pay homage. Kevin White’s son Mark, Speaker McGee’s son, the state senator.

Carl Yastrzemski and his daughter. Treasury hands now in the media — Dan Rea, Joe Fitzgerald. Dottie Dean from the Treasury Notes. Tom Kelly. Ex-city councilor Steve Murphy. Shannon O’Brien. Racetrack owner George Carney. Dick Flavin. Gary Temple. Ex-Sen. Dave Locke. House Speaker Bob DeLeo. Secretary of State Bill Galvin, state auditor Suzanne Bump.

Crane’s old lawyer Bob Popeo, a whippersnapper at age 78, arrived late and did a double-take as he surveyed the crowd.

“All the rogues are here!” he marveled.

The emcee was the current treasurer, Deb Goldberg.

“When I was growing up,” she said, pointing at Crane, “this is who I thought was always the treasurer.”

Of course she did, because Crane always was the treasurer. He got the job back in 1964 — his old high school and college classmate, John Driscoll, was about to resign to succeed the late Bill Callahan as chairman of the Turnpike. The next treasurer would be elected by the Legislature, so Driscoll tipped his old pal to start rounding up the votes before anyone else could.

That was the story, anyway. The fact was, under normal circumstances, the House speaker would have been able to claim the job. But in 1964, the speaker was John Thompson, the Iron Duke, who had been indicted for corruption and was drinking himself to death.

Something called the Mass. Crime Commission was running amok. Almost the entire Governor’s Council had been arrested. The Democrats couldn’t let the Iron Duke grab the treasury, or they would have lost it, too.

Up steps Bob Crane.

The problem was, you could only serve three terms, two-year terms at that. The old Yankees had impeccable instincts when it came to keeping Boston politicians at arm’s length from the cash. But Crane fixed all that. First he got rid of the term limits. Then he extended the terms to four years. Finally, his old pals in the Legislature presented him with a wonderful new toy called the State Lottery Commission.

“Bob Crane is a bookie!” Billy Bulger shouted out at one point yesterday.

Like everyone and everything in the room, it was an oldie but a goodie.

Goldberg marveled at how Crane had amassed so much power in what had been an obscure post. She gazed out at the assembled members of the General Court, past and present, and said, “It’s highly unusual for you guys to do something like that.”

“Thank you!” yelled Billy Bulger. “Gambling is a vice!”

It was like a St. Patrick’s Day Greatest Hits album recorded at Halitosis Hall — everybody was chuckling, everybody but Dukakis. After all these years, he still doesn’t get the joke.

This was Bob Crane’s day, a cross between an Irish wake and the kind of party you throw yourself on the day the five-year statute of limitations expires.

“Bob was the best,” Popeo said. “Whatever happened, he never felt sorry for himself. He never complained. He never whined.”

Bob is a World War II guy, a Marine sergeant at age 19. But he wasn’t the oldest guy just outside the new Robert Q. Crane conference room. That would be Francis X. Bellotti, the former AG, age 93.

“Wherever I go,” Bellotti said, “I always look around the room to see who’s still here.”

From his wheelchair, Bob Crane held up his hand and smiled. Kevin White was always our mayor, and Bob Crane, you will always be our treasurer.

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