

WISCONSIN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Arthur Saltzstein
Former Assistant to Mayor Frank Zeidler

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Interviewer: Dr. John R. Johannes

Tape Counter Number

- 000 - 135 Background before working for Zeidler. Mayor's Office staff organization when he came to the office. Duties in his position: principal conduit to department heads, some work with the Common Council, preliminary budget review, examining legislation passed by the Council. Zeidler's style very open, cooperative, good communicator and worked well with the department heads. Zeidler very conscientious of citizen complaints and following up. Some department heads felt that Zeidler wasn't capitalizing on his position but that he was concerned about complaints because things ought to be taken care of, not for good public relations. Very businesslike administration; not highly politicized. Zeidler sensitive to people and has a good memory/ability to establish rapport with individuals. Zeidler open and collegial with his staff; talked issues through with the appropriate people; informal e.g. the "Saturday Morning Kitchen Cabinet" meetings.
- 136 - 265 Department heads. Zeidler had great respect for educated people with technical knowledge such as Dr. Ed Krumbiegle, Dick Perrin (3 departments -- now DCD); Lloyd Knapp and Walter Tacky in Public Works; Harry Brockl (Harbor Commission) sometimes disagreed with Zeidler but Zeidler respected him. Other individuals in the administration. Issues surrounding the police chief position. No particular disagreements in the administration that stand out. Budget office and directors; changes in the budget procedure (Board of Estimate). Alderman Fred Meyers ("Invisible Government" paranoia) and disagreements with Zeidler. Problems with some of the developers in the city; some of the special interest lobbyists also.
- 266 - 417 Assessment of Zeidler as mayor - man for the times, excellent job, accomplished a lot. Recognized need for work in public housing; annexation and water issue; inner city revitalization. Relationship between city and school board; Walter Rilling as powerful individual associated with the school board. Purchasing school properties. Development of the port; Brockl's ability to get along with the business community (Zeidler could not). Zeidler's relationship with the business community not very good; reluctant personally to get involved with the business community. Relevancy of socialism to his wariness of business; Zeidler not confident in his ability to deal with the business community (uncomfortable). In many cases, the times proposed the issues and Zeidler was able to move forward with them. Milwaukee ahead of much of the country - annexation, infrastructure, housing. The time was receptive but Zeidler's efforts were needed to accomplish things.
- 418 - 480 Zeidler's failures or shortcomings. Didn't establish good communication with the suburbs; they didn't fit into his "master plan." Battles with the suburbs were political and elitist; never any real concentration on resolving the conflict with the suburbs. Zeidler had a real concern for social services - sought answers to problems of poverty, educational deficiencies, etc.
- 481 - 603 Dealings with the Common Council. Businesslike approach, informal lobbying. There were a number of strong egos in the Council (Fred Meyers, Charlie Quirk). John Budzien was the brightest, most perceptive member. Stories about working with the Common Council. (end tape 1, side 1)
- 604 - 702 Zeidler's style in working with people on issues: best with those who agreed with him, willing to be patient, made his points publicly. Alderman McGuire opposed Zeidler often; Meyers disagreed on issues also. Annexation had a few opponents but generally the Council shared his goals. Council sentiments on other issues (revitalization, water). Schreiber's style as Council chairman effective; generally agreed with Zeidler. Al Haas was canny and outspoken; inclined to disagree on some things. George Whittow was in business for himself; generally

conservative. Jim Mortier was very bright and a hard worker; pushed his own agenda but knew a lot about local affairs and was pretty good at consensus building.

703 - 856 Zeidler's handling of the race issue was about as good as anyone could have handled it considering the time. Change was taking place and Zeidler had been criticized for being sympathetic to blacks early on. He was probably ahead of most of the community in understanding the growing race problem. Zeidler tried to avoid confrontation. Issue probably played an important role in his deciding not to run again; very troubling issue for him but not likely that he could have avoided the coming problems. Dealing with the black community easier now than it used to be. Inner city study was largely Saltzstein's project (editing); had trouble getting black leadership to assist with it which reflected problems of relationships within the black community. Changes in the black community and group concerns today. Black professionals' roles and changing status.

857 - 1059 Key players in city government and the community. Zeidler focused on "the people" but recognized groups like the GMC; was in touch with the religious community and friendly towards labor. No one person or group was so powerful that nothing could be done in the city without consulting them first. Some people were consulted by Zeidler often or some were of particular importance on a given project but nobody was always the bottom line for getting something done. Zeidler was always open to people and ideas. Willard Downing, Pierce Bitker, Sara Ettenheim had a little more importance than some others. Downing's wife Gloria was Puerto Rican and sometimes helped solve problems with Spanish-speaking communities or people (stories about several such incidents). Such nuances and interpersonal things important to political science.

1060 - 1185 Transition to Henry Maier's administration. Personal knowledge of Maier and relationship with him before Maier became mayor. Opinions about Maier. Maier was a more typical mayor than Zeidler. The two had radically different approaches to government. Zeidler felt that government was there to serve and not for personal gain; Maier wanted to win and advance his own ideas (Norquist somewhere in between these two). Changes in city government. Maier built up more support outside of city hall than others had.

1186 - 1210 Role of religious leaders in Zeidler's time. Generally supportive of him; didn't always act in concert like they do today (not as much interreligious organization then). Influential in setting a tone - "social service approach" that was important to Zeidler. (end tape 1 side 2)

(tape 2)
000 - 104

Support of religious leaders not really cultivated; Zeidler knew a lot of them previously and they were attracted to his ideas. Zeidler undoubtedly made some calls for help with aldermen, etc but was not overt about it. Other people who might tell stories about Milwaukee government - Bob Wills and True Farris spent more time with the aldermen; Sara Ettenheim (chair of Land Commission). Zeidler very open to people and would see just about anyone who came in. (story about Bob Anderson). Zeidler had a lot of contact with the public; rode public transportation to work and talked with people often.