

WISCONSIN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Emil M. Stanislawski
Former City Supervisor and Staff Aide to O'Donnell
June 22, 1994

Interviewer: Dr. John R. Johannes

Tape Counter Number

- 000 - 078 Pressures and daily life of being a supervisor. Social service issues, meetings, weekend events. Time commitment was a big part of the reason he left the position. Did a lot of reading and attributes his power and knowledge on the board to that. A lot of casework activity in his job and had no aides to help. Changes in the nature of the county board (fewer attorneys now, people used to work part time also). More interest in county government today.
- 079 - 274 Biggest interests were budget and financial related. Pension liability issue. Vocal battle on public transportation and bus routes but plan went through without too much difficulty. Toughest fight on the board was over establishing cabinet government and changing the grandfather clause allowing the county to have a cabinet government (Tony Romano) - meeting at which it passed, lining up the votes and the relevant dividing lines among the voters on the board (passed 13-12), sent on to state level, monitoring lobbyists, details of getting it through. Cooperation with state legislators - liberals generally supported the proposal but generally more a personal issue than an ideological one (several stories about people who were against the cabinet changes for personal reasons). Personalities often more important than substance in general which was very frustrating (thinks it is still true today).
- 275 - 390 Two difficult periods: after Dick Nowakowski was elected and subsequently indicted, convicted and removed from office (Stanislawski had supported him); secondly the Don Kennedy fiasco. Kennedy had claimed he had been beaten up in his garage several times and Stanislawski believed and supported him only to find out that he had self-inflicted the wounds. Kennedy also filed some false travel claim papers toward the end of his term; seemed to be a pathological liar by the end of his term. Nowakowski was very flamboyant and continued to act in that way after he was elected board chairman; some individuals tried to bring him down and the Sentinel had 2 investigative reporters on the he case as well. Nowakowski still did outrageous things even when he knew he was being followed. Charged on a stamp violation from his campaign - donation he did not record. A lot of hostility on the board while he was being investigated; supporters were in awkward positions, conflict over who would be the new chair. O'Donnell's decision to run for county exec and its impact on the board.
- 391 - 518 Power of committee chairs on the board. Great deal of power regarding the agenda and department heads/policy influence. "Public interest v. pork barrel" issue in budgeting and finance committee. Example of Stanislawski's and Ament's pet projects in one budget and the "payback" that was asked of them. Attitude of county board that they are more competent than the "managers" or bureaucrats was difficult to deal with once he moved over into the bureaucracy.
- 519 - 602 Working with people on the board and getting support for legislation and projects - starting with those people he knew well and then talking with the others. Didn't get into a lot of politicking. Hard to work with part-timers; some people weren't worth talking to because of ongoing animosity. Quality of county board supervisors; most were bright people. (end tape 1, side 1)
- Tape 1 side 2
602 - 730 Person who was effective on the Board was Tom Kujawa; everyone liked his personality, chaired finance committee for a while, got into transportation issues. Tom Ament as board chair was probably the best politician; could work with everybody. Elected unanimously after some deals were worked out with board members for committee chairs; almost lost the election in 1980. Considered trying for chair and even county exec; in 1976

didn't think he was ready to be the chair (29 years old). Thinks he could have been elected if he stayed in 1980 but realized that he didn't really want it; too much "babysitting: of board members and petty complaints. Chair is powerful because he develops relationships with the members through their complaints; can go back to them when he needs things done. Ament not generally overt about calling in favors; more a personal relationship way of doing business but he was not reluctant to issue threats either.

731 - 843 Good department heads: Tom Brophy (Human Services) very effective in working with the Board, members respect him, he is accommodating and credible; Tony Romano was the best politician (he was ousted) who had started out as a clerk and worked his way up, did a lot of inappropriate things (against minority hiring) but brilliant as a political manager and working with anybody. Many people had problems with Supervisor John St. John; likable but tended to talk at length and give unnecessary details, meetings went on and on when he chaired). None of the department heads were incompetent; some people thought that the former medical examiner and his assistant (Elaine Samuels) were weak.

844 - 875 Didn't get along well with Joe Hutsteiner; paternalistic, looked down on Stanislawski and was anti-Nowakowski. Had trouble with others in 1976 because he supported candidates running against them.

876 - 983 Milwaukee media. Had problems with the media and favorable experiences as well. Story about woman who came in to ask for federal job funds and told the Journal about a facetious comment that he made about "500 votes" in return for what she wanted. Made into a front page story but he had already decided not to run again at that point. Avery Wittenberger was a very good reporter but he protected the parks department; Jerry Ressler at the Sentinel also good; Lisa Genetti as well. Not a great deal of respect for the assignment of covering the county; Sentinel reporters generally more interested in the beat.

984 - 1136 First election was difficult; working for the Common Council at the time and decided to run. Participated in Jim Whaner's campaign for state legislature in order to get familiar with running for office and used what he learned for his own campaign later on. Really got into the campaign in his district when he ran; stories about the election. Six-way race; became obsessed with the race and worked on it constantly for 6-8 months while taking a leave of absence of 3 months from the city. Winning was one of the greatest highs in his life. Second election was unopposed. Fundraising for the first election was not as difficult as he had expected; sold tickets to parties and had a large network of people to draw upon. Spent a considerable amount of his own money as well. Party people did not formally get involved in the race.

1137 - 1208 Interest groups and lobbyists. People very professional; nobody came in offering anything inappropriate or with political threats. Always rumors that there were questionable activities taking place but no real scandals. (end tape 1, side 2)

(tape 2)

000 - 065 Decided to leave the Board because he did not want to continue to pursue a career in politics; more interested in management and wanted to make more money also. O'Donnell wanted him to finish his term so as not to give the forum of the Finance Committee Chair position to Dan Casey, who was running against O'Donnell in 1980. Stanislawski decided to go into consulting with Arthur Young; after a few months he realized he wanted to be in the public sector. Went back to the county and was hired to be Fiscal and Budget Administrator in June of 1980. Responsible for preparing budget, central accounting, payroll, accounts payable. Not an independent political actor because working for the executive branch but had no trouble with that. Can be difficult to be open and honest with the Board and those politically opposed to the exec.

066 - 192 Issues dealt with as Budget Director: tax levy limitations were constant problem, first budget had 11% inflation to deal with. Handling budget cuts. Left specific reductions to department heads in order to maintain level of services. Most enjoyable part of the job was relationships with employees; personnel management also the most difficult part. Developed a rapport with the budget staff. Director of Administration position was boring compared to the budget position. Ended up working more on special projects and with data processing and purchasing; technical changes and leadership replacement in the former were difficult to handle. Worked on regional medical center, joint radiology project. Left the budget position because it was a natural step up; budget job very draining

and wanted a change also. County exec's office is the most exciting place to work in county government because it is at the center of activity. Job was difficult because the board was very hostile towards Schultz.

193 - 337 Managers in county government were dedicated and hardworking but problem was "promoting the expert" and not the manager. However, it is unusual for people to be forced out over management problems in the county. Advocated an internal management training program with O'Donnell; didn't work and was resisted by people in the county management structure. Personnel management most important for managers to understand; organizational structure and relevant theories/approaches should also be understood. Administrators and politics; need to understand how legislative branch functions. Discussed political as well as administrative aspects of issues. Politics sometimes had to override administrative priorities in decision making.

339 - 493 Major players in county government. Some of the most influential were county labor unions; have significant influence. More recently a lot of the things the union had accomplished have been undone. Judges have clout in the courts particularly with the number of attorneys on the board. GMC most important business group; MMAC not as involved in county issues. GMC has always hired good executive directors, business interests are very concerned with the future of the community, come in selectively on issues. In his experience, unions couldn't deliver politically and isn't sure why supervisors were so concerned about them. Supervisors overreacted to a lot of things.

494 - 600 Influence of civic and neighborhood groups. Probably have more clout than people think; when they are solid they are listened to, especially churches (have strong networks). Community groups can be good places to generate opposition as well. Many organizations probably stronger today than they were previously; many were just getting started in the seventies. Need a dedicated staff to be effective. Didn't have much contact with major community religious leadership. Cabinet government was most important change in county government; contributed to the creation of the county exec. Many conflicts over what the exec's power was. (end side 1)

Tape 2 side 2

601 - 687 Transfer of museum. Always some strain between city and county. Tax proposal that caused problems. Strain mostly at executive level; Maier hard to get along with and he and O'Donnell did not communicate much. Relationships better at lower levels. Norquist and Schultz were personal friends but drifted apart when their administrations had differing priorities. County government and suburban governments; suburbs worried that the county would take over too much (e.g. assessments). Sometimes recognized the need for cooperation such as with recycling. County and state government did not get along well; mandates issue never resolved. State tends to help in one area and then take it back somewhere else. County didn't have a lot of credibility with the state and state didn't have understanding of county problems.

688 - 765 Milwaukee government generally very ethical and clean; few cases of corruption. Strong sense of appropriateness in dealing with contracts and general business/operations. County takeover of the museum was done to enhance O'Donnell's reputation as county board chairman.

766 - 936 Frequently battled with John Doyne when they were on the board together. Doyne very skilled; disagreed on the development of the regional medical center, affirmative action (Stanislowski's district was 40% minority). Stanislowski tended to be fiscally conservative. Doyne's major achievement was the medical center. Battle with Doyne over county board staffing; he vetoed a proposal for research staff for the board but was overridden. Doyne got along well with the board; hard to dislike him. He would work with anyone who was willing and did compromise; didn't push as many issues as he should have but did accomplish certain things considered important. Grobschmidt and Doyne in conflict because of their opposing jobs. Bill Nagle didn't get along with Doyne over social reform issues; Nowakowski sometimes conflicted with Doyne; Bill Nowell got into controversy with Doyne. Doyne's supporters included O'Donnell, Charles Mulcahy, Mike Barren, Tom Ament.

937 - 1205 O'Donnell always wanted to be county exec. Shy person but strong willed and political, honest, respected loyalty. Wanted to do some restructuring in civil service (merit system), eliminate the park commission, see administrative improvements and supported his managers when they took personnel action. Stanislowski had supported him for county board chair and later county exec; never had problems getting what he needed from O'Donnell. Issue

over the composition of the transit board; debate over who (county exec or county board chair) would appoint his replacement when Stanislawski left the transit board to become finance chair. O'Donnell took the board to court when they overrode his veto of legislation to let the board chair make the appointment and he won. O'Donnell not a good communicator. Lots of clashes early on while O'Donnell was trying to establish himself; not averse to horse trading but had a tendency to stay out of things that the board got into (e.g. PIC). County didn't play much of a role into developing the downtown area; focused on outlying areas such as the airport, regional medical center, O'Donnell Park proposals. Issues related to the airport: parking, borrowing funds, enterprise fund.

(tape 3)
000 - 068

O'Donnell's opponents on the board: Ament, Joe Hutsteiner, Bill Nowell, Dan Casey early in his term. Later on had problems with Dan Cupertino, John St. John. Conflicts started out being substantive and evolved into personal problems. By the end of his term he and Ament got along much better. Key advisors were Leo Talsky, Don Weber, Dave Ziapecki were top three; turned to Bill Drew for advice at times, several others. Leo's reputation was overstated by many people; basically a decent person with some eccentricities. His weakest point was not giving enough time to opposing viewpoints, which was how he got his reputation for being devious.

069 - 170

Schultz beating O'Donnell. Public wanted change; negative publicity and public sympathy around the firings. O'Donnell looked older than he was and Schultz was younger and dynamic. Schultz had some phenomenal skills - speaking, reading and absorbing information, analyzing issues. However, he had no basic interpersonal political skills - wanted to please everybody. Tended to say harsh things in public when he lost his temper (overreacted at times and lashed out). Talked with reporters for hours at a time and articles would come out wrong. Very hard for his staff to deal with. Supporters on the board were Penny Podell, Larry Kenny. Many opposed him but Ament, Rich Nyklawicz, Dan Cupertino, Dick Bussler, Paul Matthews tended to oppose him often.

171 - 271

Schultz reorganized and downsized county government, brought in Howard Fuller. Hospital administration changed but board wouldn't help in that area. Organization of parks department altered - classification of contracts and positions increased flexibility of workers and jobs. Accomplishments were significant; good amount of financial improvements/savings. Press doesn't look at structural/institutional changes as very important; what is covered isn't always the most crucial story. County Board is too large; should be 9 members maximum. County should limit its operations more and focus on major areas of expenditure. Many issues with county government are ongoing; part of Stanislawski's reason for leaving was that problems don't go away or change (only crises bring real change). Problems/issues surrounding the county hospital. (end tape 3, side 1)