

Michigan Political History Society

NEWS

Vol. 3 Issue 1

March 1996

Governor George Romney

by Charles E. Harmon

One of my many lasting memories of Governor George Romney is his "Quisling" speech, delivered at a state Republican convention in Grand Rapids on May 9, 1964, well into his first term as Michigan's Governor. (Quisling, for those readers too young to know or care, is a synonym for traitor, referring to Vidkun Quisling, a Norwegian who betrayed his country in World War II.)

I still have a hand edited copy of that speech, which I covered as a political writer for the Booth newspapers. Governor Romney had been having a very difficult time with the far right of the GOP which at that time controlled the State Senate, remnants of the mossback conservatives who had battled Soapy Williams and John Swainson to political standstills. Now they were battering the first Governor of their own party since 1948. Ten of them had deserted Governor Romney and cut a deal with Democrats on legislative and congressional reapportionment.

Governor Romney let loose at the convention, referring to the Republican dissidents as "political Quislings who sold out to the opposition" and "modern know nothings", and calling for action to clean house. The more he got into the speech, the more impassioned he became, and the more he took the audience with him. They were on their feet - some on chairs - cheering and also looking for the lawmakers in question (some of whom fled the hall during the talk).

The Senate political alliance soon crumbled, and in that period Governor Romney took firm control of the GOP machinery. Incidentally, only one of the 10 senators in question returned to office the following year.

Later that year, George Romney, at 57, had just won his second of three terms as Governor of Michigan when I became his press secretary, succeeding Dick Milliman who went on to a successful career as a newspaper publisher. The next four years were to be among the most crucial of Romney's life, ranging from peaks of success to depths of failure.

Since his death this past July, I've tried to identify and examine some highlights of that period in his career, before he

left Lansing to join the first Nixon administration in early 1969 and turned the Governor's office over to William Milliken. Here are some of my thoughts, very unrefined at this juncture.

He was an excellent Governor. David Broder and Stephen Hess, in their 1967 book "The Republican Establishment," said that as Governor, "Romney has been first rate, perhaps even superb, in the tradition of Earl Warren and Thomas E. Dewey, Herbert Lehman and Adlai E Stevenson."

He was a take charge Governor, a fine administrator who attracted excellence to state positions and who tapped the minds and resources of unique individuals.

He dealt with three legislatures...the first controlled by the aforementioned conservative Republicans, the second by Democrats, the third by a thin GOP margin. He ultimately squeaked through his programs, sometimes taking several years to do so and sometimes with a few Democrats providing the



(continued on page 3)

Inside this Issue

- Oral Histories on Videotape page 2
- Celebrating Millie and Elly page 4
- Annual Meeting page 5

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Videotaping captures Michigan's Political History!

Significant progress has been made by the Michigan Political History Society in fulfilling one its major goals of capturing Michigan's political history - through VIDEOTAPING! The tapes will provide greater knowledge of Michigan's political history, resulting in a better understanding of the way in which we live today. They will also serve as tools of learning for ages.

Many MPHS events have been videotaped, including George Weeks' Stewards of the State, The Incomparable Frank Murphy by Professor Sidney Fine, Con Con Symposium, Tribute to Millie & Elly in Commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of Women's Suffrage and The Political & Legislative History of the Mackinac Bridge.

Now, oral histories of several persons of political significance have either been completed or are being arranged. Highlights of completed oral histories follow.

Irving Bluestone

Irv Bluestone was Vice President of the UAW, Administrative Assistant and long time confidante to Walter Reuther. Bluestone discusses Reuther's educational objectives, his relationships with Eleanor Roosevelt, Martin Luther King and others. Bluestone also recalls a meeting with Hubert Humphrey and Reuther, following the disastrous Democratic Convention in Chicago in 1968 to discuss particularly how Hubert Humphrey could distance himself from the Vietnam tragedy.

Tom Downs

This oral history shows one person's contribution to reorganizing the Democratic Party in 1948 and developing cooperation between the labor movement and the Democratic Party. An expert in elections law, Downs describes his experiences with recounts and efforts in many states to keep fraudulent LaRouche petitions off the ballot.

Doug Fraser

Past UAW President, Doug Fraser discusses his rise in the UAW, the union's role in the Chrysler bailout, the UAW's efforts

to seek improved pensions and health care benefits. His political and legislative activities, both in Washington and Lansing are described.

Adelaide Hart

Adelaide Hart was a delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1961-62, Vice-chair of the Michigan Democratic Party, and active in the Detroit Federation of Teachers. This oral history describes her role in the Constitutional Convention. It also explains her early participation in the Detroit Federation of Teachers. The tape features a candid discussion of the role of religion in her life and work.

Elly Peterson

An hour long videotaped interview of Elly Peterson, now 81 years old, discusses highlights of the political career of this "living legend" of Michigan politics. Elly Peterson's profile is in this issue of the MPHS newsletter

Mildred Jeffrey

Also profiled in this newsletter, Millie Jeffrey discusses her work as an advocate, political activist and organizer in this hour long interview.

All videotaped oral histories are available at the State of Michigan library. Tapes and transcripts also can be borrowed by calling (517)336-5742.

Oral histories planned in 1996, include Robert Griffin, William A. Ryan and Helen Milliken.

The cost of completing a videotaped oral history ranges from \$700 to \$1500, depending on the location of the interview. We strongly encourage MPHS members to sponsor or contribute to our efforts to create these lasting records of Michigan's rich political history.

The Michigan Political History Society thanks interviewers Tom Downs, Bill Ballenger and Bob LeBrandt. Tapes of interviews and MPHS events have been made possible through the services of TCI Cable, Video Productions of Escanaba and David and Beverly Lang of LTS Productions.

margin. The long list of legislative accomplishments ranged from implementation of the then-new state constitution, reorganization of the state governmental machinery, and fiscal reform to key civil rights measures such as open housing, the first state minimum wage law and early steps to deal with air and water pollution.

He took hold of the state Republican party, which had a well deserved reputation for negativism and had not won the governorship since 1946, and reshaped it into a modern, moderate GOP which was to control state government for 20 years.

His style of campaigning was epitomized by a great explosion of energy, seeking out the voter on the run while using sophisticated methods of identifying and convincing ticket splitters. He also effectively used television in its early stages of election influence. As a result, he won his three elections by a total of nearly one million votes.

His quest for the presidency was his central failure. On the heels of the Goldwater debacle of 1964 and Governor Romney's outspoken opposition to the forces and philosophies that pervaded the Arizona Senator's campaign, Governor Romney was considered the leading candidate for the 1968 presidential nomination. But he was held in great suspicion by the hard core conservatives of the national party and equally so by the national press corps which could equate him with neither the political style of a Lyndon Johnson or Richard Nixon, nor the glamour of the martyred John F. Kennedy.

When he made his famous "brainwashed" statement in 1967, his presidential campaign was already on the rocks, lacking a firm political base. The statement was simply a final nail in the campaign coffin and he soon withdrew.

His relationships with the media could and should be the subject of a book. He had a keen news sense and used it effectively. He enjoyed working

with Michigan's print and electronic media, met often with the press corps on an individual basis and held frequent, daily - even twice daily - news conferences. As a result, his plans, programs and positions were constantly in the public mind.

That was at the state level. At the national level, the media refused to accept him - his evangelistic approach and citizen-style beliefs were contrary to their political instincts. At times he stumbled in his efforts to enunciate his position on Vietnam, and they chewed him to pieces. One of my unhappiest moments was watching several members of what we referred to unaffectionately as the "rat pack" cluster together after a news conference in Idaho and decide what approach to take to his comments. The more he opened up to them, the more they took him to task. There were times when "no comment" would have been the best approach, but that was not his style.

A few comments about the Detroit riots of 1967, certainly the nadir of his governorship: That terrible week cut him to the quick as we watched anger and lawlessness burn down a once great city.

We spent that week living and working in the Detroit police headquarters. Part of it was spent in a major telephone confrontation between Governor Romney and President Johnson over sending federal troops in to help quell the riot. Recent biographies of Abe Fortas, an LBJ confidante, have substantiated our beliefs at the time that Johnson used the occasion to embarrass Governor Romney politically and otherwise, to a degree successfully.

One of the key elements of the confrontation was Johnson's demand that Governor Romney declare that an "insurrection" was occurring as a condition of sending in the troops. The Governor refused to do so, thereby sparing every fire insurance policy from being declared null and void. The man who gave him that sound legal advice was Robert Danhof, later to have a

distinguished career as Chief Judge of the State Court of Appeals.

Finally, I'll remember George Romney as a principled man who said what he believed. When he said that "the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were divinely inspired documents," he meant it. When he attacked bigotry and political extremism, he meant it.

And when he said he had been "brainwashed," he meant it. It was an extemporaneous comment, perhaps his most honest statement. Those who pilloried him at the time later admitted to the truth of his comment, most recently Robert McNamara.

Those of us who were given the opportunity to work closely with George Romney will always benefit from that experience. We were taught by an expert.

He was very human, yet is some ways larger than life. His kind rarely pass our way.

**Our thanks to the author, Charles E. Harmon, for sharing his insights into the career and personality of Governor George Romney, who died in 1995. Mr. Harmon served as Governor Romney's press secretary from 1964 to 1969. He serves on the Board of Directors of the Michigan Political History Society, and owns and operates Riverside Communications in Eaton Rapids.*

MPHS Plans Informative Events for 1996

The first 1996 MPHS event - "Henry Ford in the Twentieth Century" - is planned for March 20 at the Country Club of Lansing. Marking the centennial of the auto industry, David L. Lewis, Professor of Business History at the University of Michigan, will discuss Ford's unsuccessful bid for the U.S. Senate seat in 1918.

Also in the planning stages for 1996 is an exploration of the career of Senator Harold Vandenberg and an event in southeastern Michigan.

MPHS and Michigan Women's Foundation Join in Celebration of Millie and Elly

Over 200 people gathered in Lansing on September 19 for a chat with Millie Jeffrey and Elly Peterson, a benefit for the Michigan Women's Foundation, cosponsored by the Michigan Political History Society. Over \$27,000 was raised for the Michigan Women's Foundation.

Mildred Jeffrey

by Jessica Ford

Millie Jeffrey is, as Rep. Pat Schroeder once noted, "a political godmother" for many of today's most notable women in politics. A lifetime of dedication to social justice, and particularly to the rights of women and labor, has made her a central figure in the history of women's emergence into the mainstream of politics, labor and business. And after 50 years of tireless activism, Millie Jeffrey continues her campaign for social justice with an energy, wit and intelligence that makes her one of the most well respected and well loved women in political and feminist circles in Michigan and beyond. Noting her seemingly endless energy, Lana Pollack said, "I should live half as long and do a third as much."

Always driven by a resolute sense of fairness, Millie Jeffrey got her first job as a union organizer in Philadelphia with the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America in 1935, working jobs in factories just long enough to recruit for the union, moving from one to the next as she was fired, arrested or threatened by company management. A highly capable and dynamic organizer, her union work in the 1930s and 40s continued as she served as first president of the United Auto Worker's Women's Bureau after World War II, and until 1978 she acted as a special assistant to UAW president Walter Reuther.

During her years at the UAW, Millie Jeffrey was a passionate, idealistic, and highly effective champion of the rights of women, pushing for equality for union women, improving day care for working mothers and working for better pay and working conditions.

As a national committeewoman for the National Democratic Party, a founder and chair of the National Women's Political Caucus, and an early member of the National Organization of Women, Millie Jeffrey has always been active in the campaign efforts of many female candidates and a consistent champion of equal representation of women in politics. When Geraldine Ferraro accepted the nomination for Vice-President in 1984, Millie Jeffrey was on the podium; of the nomination, she commented, "That was history. It is good to know you're in a moment of history." Through her limitless enthusiasm and commitment to labor, civil rights, and women's equality, Millie Jeffrey has created many such moments.

Elly Peterson

by Jessica Ford

A "living legend" in state and national politics, Elly Peterson was the first woman to head a major political party, serving as chairman of the Michigan Republican Party from 1965-1969, and also held numerous other positions in the

Republican Party organization.

She began her political career in Michigan as a secretary and assistant to the party chair in 1957, but her enormous organizational strength and energy quickly propelled her to the top of the party organization. Her reputation as an exceptional organizer brought her to Washington as well, as assistant chairman of the national committee, a position she held for a year until a bid for a U.S. Senate seat in 1964. With over 2,000 volunteers throughout the state, she competed with two men to win the nomination and, thought she lost to the popular Democratic incumbent Phil Hart, she notes that her groundbreaking campaign as the first female nominated for a U.S. Senate seat in Michigan "proved the power of women in politics."

At a time when it "wasn't easy being a woman in politics," Elly opened doors for women to get involved in politics as they rallied around her trailblazing activism. Despite resistance from some party leaders, she never wavered in her commitment to political activism, breaking barriers to women's involvement in party politics at a time when women were still barred from many meetings and had to fight hard to be active. She remembers the patronizing attitude of even those men who were supportive of her efforts, particularly Romney's description of her as someone who "thinks like a man, looks like a woman and works like a dog." She was widely respected, however, and Zolten Ferency's description of her as an "old political warhorse with the scars of many battles" demonstrates the bipartisan recognition of her groundbreaking efforts.

Throughout her career, Elly has promoted the interests of women and worked to expand their political and economic power. From her strong support of the ERA to her many campaign efforts for female candidates to, perhaps most significantly, her own political leadership, Elly has been firmly committed to women's rights and grassroots activism. ■

Jessica Ford is a senior at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota, completing her bachelors degree in history. She was a summer intern for the Michigan Women's Foundation.

About the Michigan Women's Foundation

The mission of the Michigan Women's Foundation is to promote economic and personal self-sufficiency for women and girls throughout the state of Michigan. A non-profit, non-partisan partnership of supporters statewide, the Foundation supports woman-run nonprofit organizations through direct financial support, technical assistance and education.

Since it began operations in 1987, the Michigan Women's

Political and Legislative History of the Mackinac Bridge

40 political history enthusiasts of all ages traveled to Mackinac Island to learn about the history of the great Mackinac Bridge. Discussion with Larry Rubin, Director of the Mackinac Bridge Authority, was the highlight of the weekend. Special thanks to Mr. Rubin, and to Tom Cleary and Tom Farrell for coordinating the program; and to Dan Musser III, President of the Grand Hotel, who hosted the reception and provided quality services over the weekend.

On Sunday, October 15, Daniel Kelly interviewed Mr. Rubin about the building of the bridge. Highlights of the interview follow:

Kelly: Who had the idea for the Mackinac Bridge?

Rubin: More than one hundred years ago, in 1884, a man by the name of Thomas Bates, editor and publisher of the *Traverse City Record Eagle*.

He reported that the experiments to use a boat to transport people across the straits had failed because of ice in the straits. He recommended that they should build a permanent connection, either a bridge or a tunnel.

Kelly: What did you do to help build the bridge?

Rubin: I was the

manager or the boss. First, it was a matter of getting the legislation or the laws that they needed to build the bridge, because you have to have permission from a number of agencies to use their property. Then there was the matter of raising the money, which was a difficult task, because at the time it was the largest bond issue ever...I had to raise \$100 million. After that, we had to build the bridge. It was my position to be between my bosses, the members of the Mackinac Bridge Authority and the contractors and consulting engineers and all of the people who were actually involved in the physical construction of the bridge.

Foundation has grown from a small, grassroots organization granting \$50,000 a year to an endowed grantmaking organization distributing \$270,000 in 1994. In the past eight years, the Foundation has granted over \$600,000 to projects as diverse as science camp for girls, job skills training for older women, and the purchase of computer hardware and software for women's nonprofits. The Foundation is supported by a broad range of committed individuals, corporations and foundations across the state.



Dan Musser, III, President of the Grand Hotel, and Kevin Kelly, MPHS Secretary-Treasurer, review the program from the dedication of the Mackinac Bridge.

Daniel Kelly is a fourth grader at Glenclairn Elementary school in East Lansing.

Kelly: How do you think the Mackinac Bridge turned out?

Rubin: It was a wonderful thing. It united our state which up to that point was separated into two parts. The people living in the Upper Peninsula were more attuned to Wisconsin than they were to Michigan. For example, the newspaper in Sault Ste. Marie would buy its supplies from Wisconsin firms. All that changed with the building of the Mackinac Bridge.



MPHS Vice-President Mark Murray enjoys conversation with Mr. and Mrs. John Mackey at the reception at the Grand Hotel.

MICHIGAN POLITICAL HISTORY SOCIETY Annual Membership Meeting

Plan to attend the MPHS 3rd Annual Membership Meeting on Saturday, March 23, from 9:00 to noon at the Michigan State Medical Society, 120 West Saginaw, East Lansing. PLEASE CALL (517)336-5742 IF YOU PLAN TO ATTEND THE ANNUAL MEETING.

AGENDA

1. Call to order
 2. Approval of 1995 Annual Meeting Minutes
 3. Approval of Member Meeting Agenda
- OLD BUSINESS
1. President's Report - Sharman A. Moore
 2. Vice-President's Report - Mark Murray
 3. Secretary/Treasurer's Report - Kevin A. Kelly
 4. Events Committee Report - Sharon Reid
 5. Archives Committee Report
 6. Newsletter Committee Report - Mary Anne Ford
 7. Membership/Development Committee Report - Kevin A. Kelly
 8. Attorney's Report - Tom Downs
- NEW BUSINESS
1. Board Nominating Committee's Report - Kevin A. Kelly
 2. Election of Board Members - Eight Terms Expiring
 - Nominations
 - Election
 3. Events - Upcoming & Proposed
 4. 1996 Goals

MISCELLANEOUS
ADJOURNMENT

MPHS Membership

Membership in the Michigan Political History Society continues to grow, as do the number of individuals choosing a lifetime membership. This membership application can be used to renew your membership for 1996, or to share with a friend or colleague. At \$150, lifetime memberships offer a convenient alternative to annual renewal.

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MPHS Purpose Statement

"Knowledge of Michigan's political history and understanding of its impact throughout time provides the framework for envisioning our future."

While our political environment has had and will continue to have a major impact on the quality of life of Michigan's citizens, there is limited understanding of the political history that has brought us to this point in time.

The Michigan Political History Society has evolved in recognition of the need to appreciate the past so as to better envision the future for our great State.

The Michigan Political History Society is established to:

- inspire greater knowledge of our political history
- educate the public as to the role politics has historically played in the State and its relevancy to future policy-making
- study and document events, groups, and persons notable in Michigan's political history
- advance research and writing of political history
- share the experience and wisdom of the older generation with the younger generation
- cultivate working relationships with pertinent institutions and organizations
- provide a common foundation for political leaders, educators, public administrators, historians and interested citizens
- encourage and facilitate the deposit of privately-held political documents with appropriate public institutions
- promote interest in civic affairs and participation in civic duties
- foster bipartisan communication and mutual respect and civility
- communication on a regular basis with members
- plan and coordinate functions

Michigan Political History Society

1996 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Home Phone _____ Business Phone _____ Fax _____

Enclosed is my check for membership in the amount of:

_____ \$10.00 Student Membership – Annual

_____ \$150.00 Lifetime Membership

_____ \$20.00 Regular Membership – Annual

_____ Other Contribution

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