

Henry G. Loeb, Jr.
By Elizabeth Gritter
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Memphis Public Library
Interview time: Nearly 2 hours.

Henry G. Loeb, Jr.

He also had mentioned to me that after Crump's death, two factions. Orgill/Burch camp went one way and Loeb went another way.

TAPE 1: SIDE A

Going through materials he brought me

Profile by Jackson Baker but referring to this I think that he said his dad said he would've liked to have put his two cents in with article.

John Gaston employees picketing – an injunction – he showed me that news clipping to emphasize his position on labor, even before 1968.

Loeb appointed first black person head of one of the departments – (probably Odell Horton clipping).

Loeb quit the Democrat party, became independent.

Bad blood between Farris and Loeb. In 1950s, they probably both looked at as anti-Crump.

Dad didn't have strong labor support behind him.

When he was out of office, he didn't draw a pension b/c he believed that it was unfair he got such a better deal than other employees.

He couldn't tolerate government abuse like of expenditures or by gov't officials.

He said he wouldn't call At the River I Stand the most objective but it is comprehensive.

Article – his best comprehension of what happened.

424 – here we start interview.

In '68 he was 15. When King was killed, they spent one night at one place and then a different night another place b/c fearful. Rest of time in office (until 1971) – police protection and even before King was killed. He evidently got a lot of threats, but he never changed his policy – he met with people. His position – if deals with public safety,

you don't have the right to go on strike. Law is on the books and it has been fortified since then.

He didn't recognize the union b/c he believed the law that public employees didn't have right to strike. He said he thought that it was okay to be in a union.

He stood by his decision until his death? Was unapologetic.

IN a simplistic way, he could be interpreted as flag-waving law and order guy. Law is law. If it's on the books, I'm elected to enforce law and I'm going to enforce it. One, it was standard labor dispute and then became dramatized to something beyond that and then exponentially after tragedy that took place. I didn't discuss it that much with him – other things better to talk about it. All he heard when he went out was political. It was silly to say can you reiterate what we heard you talk about this afternoon.

What we heard at dinner table was exactly what we heard in public.

Why did he refused to increase wages?

I don't remember exact numbers. If you picked up garbage, it was as low as you can go tradewise. So, I think he looked at it as it ought to be paid the least. It's looked at differently now. He's not saying whether that's right or wrong. In 68, there was a totally different perspective about things.

Big issue wasn't the raise but union dues check off. He was strongly against, other stuff was standard labor stuff--.

SIDE B

He saw it as big municipal union trying to do what it's done in other municipalities. No way an illegal strike is going to transpire here.

Do you think it would've made a difference if workers were white?

No, absolutely not. In 1968, things were polarized. Less so now. I don't think it would've made any difference. There was another municipal issue – with hospital strike which I show you.

Looking literature some say it was strictly about race, others say it was labor.

It was 1968, that was bottom of barrel, you wouldn't have gotten white people wanting to pick up garbage. That is how American society was at the time, except that was how things were then. I think he tried to do progressive things. He was first guy who appointed black department head with Odell Horton. It was no tlike he was trying to reverse things. I think he was pointed in right direction. It was string of things that happened here.

How deal with King's death.

He was extremely saddened, a mess. As far as political goals, it was domestic issue. My mother said, "I've had enough." She pretty well told him if he wanted to run again, do it solo. He was going to run for governor and he wasn't getting negative feedback on polls. She couldn't handle it.

After 1968, if he had wanted to run for mayor again, I think he would've won.

I saw from article before that she didn't like being a political spouse.

Yes

Unique about your dad, he answered letters, called back everybody, meet people.

Yes. He had a car phone before others did. He called people back on his clock.

Anybody who wanted to see him, would talk to him, he'd do it.

Describe Dutch Treat luncheons.

I don't know what year he started it, where friends of conservative political slant get together once a month on Saturday at various restaurants. It started in the 1950s. After out of office, he enjoyed it more, I think, it was his way of staying involved. What you saw with the one you went to was pretty much how always was.

Describe typical format.

Sometimes political speaker. People of political interest or if near election time candidates. What he liked about it, it was public's license on everybody else, total access. You had to play ball like he did, answer questions, argue against who you were running against. A lot of times hardball questions.

Civic involvement prominent in 50s and 60s.

Yes.

He was involved with civic clubs?

Yes, he was active in the Scouts, He didn't do stuff like Masonic thing. He was more into things – he liked helping handicapped people.

That b/c his brother was handicapped.

I think it had something to do with it. When built new airport, he was conservative about some matters... He pressed them to have blind person in airport.

Civic clubs important when Dad ran for mayor.

Yeah, I was too young to remember. When he would get involved, he meant be an elected official and responsive to people. He also encouraged other people to involved with community clubs, calling and writing elected officials.

Anti-machine platform in 1955 – why took position and why his motivations, right after Crump.

He was a young progressive sort of guy even those things changed when he got older. He looked at it like the Crump machine was b/f the war and he was after the war and things were different now. New generation and things didn't work that way. There were a couple of schools of it and they went in different directions.

I saw in 1959 he split with Orgill and ran against him.

Yes. He mentions Atlantic Union/Now. He never was in that kind of direction, he was a totally, virulently anti-Communist, anything that had to do with collective study was a bad trigger with him. I didn't discuss it with him. I picked up afterward. I think he saw that as too Communist-like. Orgill or Burch, I can see how they went off different directions. Burch and Farris he saw as powerhouse law firms, different than public service.

Seems like your dad more concentrated on local affairs than international rather than both.

Yeah. I think that's why too he had apprehensions about running statewide. He lived in an area where he knew everybody.

I saw in 1955 he ran against CP, but in 1959, he shifted for it. He came out against election of Sugarmon.

He was a delegate to Democratic convention in 1960. He was an early Blue Dog or whatever Democrat. I saw him as progressive for the time. He was one of beginning of democrat party not what it used to be – seems to be more big government. He wanted more power locally, stronger state rights, so after he became elected mayor in 1960, he didn't last long, he quickly said, I'm no longer a Democrat, I'm independent.

So that shift occurred right after elected mayor.

Yeah. What transpired from 1955 to 1960, I think, This guy is coming from school – run gov't like business – minimally and efficiently. That's what this generation I think Republicans have grown into but Democrats gone in direction of big powerful gov't that addresses whatever problem comes up. He didn't look at it that way.

Why shift from opposing segregationist group and courting black vote and then shifting in 1959 to running as an outspoken segregationist. I'm trying to get a sense of where he's coming from.

I think we just get back to law and order thing, what the laws were. He hedges. I don't remember him being like a George Wallace like opponent of segregation. First guy who put black department head in. Ingram hadn't done that. I'm not saying that proves things and I guess you could say somebody was doing that to posture himself politically. He was not somebody that did things (). He did what he felt was right. I'm trying to remember what you would refer too.

Are you familiar with how Sugarmon ran for PWC.

Right against Farris.

If there had been a split white vote, there was a fear among white politicians, community that Sugarmon would've been elected. Strategies to defeat Sugarmon. Let's pass a runoff law. He was beyond that. His reasoning – we need a majority, we can't be currying to minority interests. I want a sense of where he's coming from. That alienate from black community.

Yes. (regarding alienate community.). This would be good one to talk to mother, they disagreed. She advised him not to get in the race. He probably subsequently regretted

doing it b/c Farris he fell out with it. She advised him not to get into Sugarmon-Farris race.

To not endorse any--?

Yes.

I notice da lot of pressure on him to endorse.

Yes.

Why did she tell him that?

I think she looked it at like – she was developing good political sensibilities too – you've got plenty on your table as mayor. Don't get into this rat race that you're leaving, let it take care of itself, re: PWC. She had good radar, b/c you're right – it did probably come back and haunt him, I guess.

Then, black community was alienated by the fact that he called for the run off law to be passed. Decided not to pass it. Then a movement to get white candidates to withdraw from race. I saw he and Armour were behind that. Why so significant to prevent black victory at that time?

Like I say, I 'm too young to remember. Go back to 1960 political sensibilities. I don't know what to say. I never heard him say, "I wish I had supported Sugarmon instead of Farris." I did hear him blast Farris. It was one where he probably shouldn't have gotten into. Hew as outspoken. He would rarely say his vote was secret, that's the way he was. He couldn't help not to get into something.

Did he make attempts to reach the black community at all b/c consistently throughout his political career they didn't think highly of him?

Like I say, he would talk to anybody. I think what was going on, we have to go back to putting things in political perspective. We're talking about early 60s, talking about someone who b/f had run as a progressive democrat, supported Kennedy, within one years time – whoa, I've not only got such a different perspective, I don't want ot be involved in the Democrat party anymore. I feel so uncomfortable with it, I quit. Things changed fast. In early 1960s, things changed.

So, he was more conservative, status quo should be maintained--.

Yes.

Concerning race relations?

Yes. He didn't make laws, he enforced him. The real racial issues back then were not so much which guys were running for PWC but schools. School board then, mayor didn't really have anything to do with it.

All white candidates at the time wsa for segregation. With him he said about social customs and traditions.

Yes.

Also relates to his philosophy of preserving the law?

I think on stuff like that it'd be easier if he was a state legislature. He never defied court order or new laws like George Wallace. He was certainly not of that school. You're right, he was conservative and I think in the 1950s progressive. I think he was still progressive but okay I'm in office and the bottom line is I'm going to run it efficiently like a business. It's not like a grab bag for the most anyone can get out of it. I think that's where he was coming from. I think he may have looked at it like black political interests were trying to do things too quick. I don't know. He's hedging.

Me: It's hard for me to put myself back in that generation.

Did his views on race change over time do you think?

Like I say, whatever, I can't say anything that the Supemer Ct handed down he agreed with or everything with Congress handed down. But it became a law, so a law is a law. Have to obey the law. That's hwere you have to fine tune something look at it historically, say where is someone coming from 1960s perspective. Back then, this wasn't NYC it was Memphis. He said something along the lines of constituency...

He said majority rather than minority represented, he said.

B/f blacks became an organized group, it could be that he, like some people, if you don't vote, if you're not activated, tough. He was of that school. I'm of that school now. He may have seen it as sizeable segment of blacks didn't vote in 1950s. I'm tuned into constituency that elected me, that's what counted.

A lot of blacks did vote in 1959. I saw in profile with Jackson Baker that some blacks met with him and he turned his back on them.

I read that. I don't know the context. He said he welcomed Black Panthers in but they weren't nice meetings. I don't know what was going on—well I sort of know. It may have been his way of saying there's nothing else I can talk about.

It wasn't just your father but almost all Memphians were segregationist back then, that's how social life was.

Yeah.

Do you think he appealed to white voters, to come out as a segregationist b/c he knew that's how white Memphians wanted it to be?

Segregation thing, I don't know how to address it b/c like I say it was a different day and time. As far as our household goes, as far as "N" word goes, that was never mentioned. We were slapped if it was done. I never heard him say that in the house. I'm not saying I haven't heard it after the fact. He was a politician. It was a different perspective then.

Ever say anything about black electoral politics, 1959 eleciton?

He was of school then like he was later, when it gets down to nitty gritty, who you're going to vote for – best qualified, who's honest, who's going to be responsive to your needs.

TAPE 2

Also see things from your perspective. Looking at things historically probably a lot of whites then that whoever came up/black.

I saw it wasn't just him but also white citizens putting pressure on him.
Yeah.

I think a lot of existing ones focus on leaders.

Yeah. Like I say, have to chronologically think about things the right way. I know in the 1950s the pools were segregated. I remember he said something like whatever is on the books so be it. What's controversial from today's perspective is that there were laws like that.

He was behind Kennedy in the 1960s. He wasn't invited to inauguration.
That I didn't know.

He had been a reporter.
Yeah.

He became independent but really what we think of as conservative and Republican now.
Yeah.

Did he ever officially become Republican?
No. Even the Republican Party here was a little too clubby for him.

I saw that he didn't like where Democrats were headed and didn't see himself as Republican either.
Yes. I'm too young regarding Kennedy but I remember with LBJ, he despised him. He had perspective here's a little honky country county political type who holds highest office. He thought he was bad news.

He didn't like the social programs.
No. He thought he just played political campaigns – he was making decisions about what is political payback. Dad didn't think like that.

This anti-labor, where come from? Laundry business?
Probably had something to do with what formulated how he worked. He always looked at business from a managerial perspective. He looked at it as I'm loyal to who elected me.

He saw labor as powerful interest group that took away from common person?
Yes. (He brings up a lot how he was anti-John Lindsay's philosophy, see article.)

Interesting to think about how this was a heyday of labor and also a time of corruption of labor, like with Senate Racketeering. That probably had something to do with his views. Yeah.

Why decide to run for mayor?

He had strong following against him from Dutch Treat luncheon to whoever phone call he answered to who he ran into on the street.

He seemed ambitious – that's how he has been portrayed.

I think he liked being mayor but he seemed apprehensive re: doing things outside of here? He didn't want to run for governor – I don't think it was just my mother but he did tell me that he was apprehensive about running for statewide office b/c I can't see living out of town.

He was popular in Memphis as mayor among white citizens.

Yes.

Strong following with Dutch Treat luncheon.

Well that was small part of his following. He was strong in the blue collar areas. Frayser was a stronghold for him, mostly white then. Now it's mostly black. Whitehaven same thing – he was strong. He was strong in inner city and East Memphis with conservative whites. That's what it took to win. Yeah, but it can be hard for me to think about how to talk about then.

Do you think he would've won if Orgill had ran?

It's hard to beat an incumbent. It's hard to say. Memphis had a conservative slant to it. It's hard to know if conservative slant would've gone to incumbent, b/c that's a conservative thing to do. Dad was more conservative than Orgill.

I think with 1959 race you see a rise of conservatism and see today and see with switch of your father. Polarization. Memphis is unique with machine government. IN some ways it's like rest of US and it isn't in other respects. Like elsewhere you see whit eflight, rise of Republicanism, polarization between blacks and whites. Even in Detroit in book *Origins of Urban Crisis*.

Loeb said that he lived in New York 11 years doing real estate business and thought of Memphis as like other cities. But he seemed to agree with me with my analysis. He mentioned gerrymandering as real impact politically. He points out that back then it's hard to say sometimes what is liberal and what is conservative.

I mentioned I read in 1961 that liberal and conservative labels don't mean much here.

Yes.

Could've dealt with break from machine rule – confusion about labels.

Yes. He knows a lot of Crump grand or great grandchildren. They're oblivious to politics, the ones I know. It's funny how things change.

What was your dad's relationship like with business?

I guess he had a good relationship with the business community.

Makes sense he'd be for blue-collar workers, be popular with them, given he was against special interests.

Yes. He had policy with gals if attractive woman, he'd see anybody but it'd have to have a chaperone. He had a policy against contributions, some rule, limit on what he would take on gifts. I think he was one of ones that made that city policy. He saw it as extortion/black mail, pretty gals could easily be problematic.

I saw he didn't like Armour.

I think it was Crum pand him butting heads.

I ran across something that Civil Rights Commission was coming to Memphis but he didn't want them to come, thought that it would do harm. As far as I know it was just a fact finding.

I don't remember specifics. Go back to historical memory. He was a Democrat that worked for Kennedy and then publically denounced his association. From his perspective it might be these guys are going to come down and it's going to backfire on us b/c falling out with Democrats.

I asked him anything else to add.

He said he thought I was approaching it the right way. He said that he would not take a prepared speech with him. He would give short speech and then want to hear from the crowd. He liked give and take, Q and A. He was Reaganesque in that way. That was the way that he liked doing it rather than being on his soap box.

You see that reflected with Duth Treat Luncheon.

Yeah. You seem like you've been really thorough. I'm trying to think of anything big you've overlooked in terms of what he was thinking about. I think you've addressed it well by the stuff you asked me. You got lucky by being here with one of these meetings. Call me if anything comes up.