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WILLARD "DOC" VER MEULEN

Oral history interview on politics in Grand Rapids under the McKay machine, especially Ver Meulen's experiences organizing the Home Front and Gerald Ford's involvement in politics.

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I N T E R V I E W W I T H

Dr. Willard B. Ver Meulen

BY

Dr. Thomas F. Soapes
Oral Historian

on

January 26, 1980

for

G E R A L D R. F O R D L I B R A R Y

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Willard B. Ver Meulen
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This interview is being conducted with Dr. Willard B. Ver Meulen at his home in Grand Rapids, Michigan on January 26, 1980. The interviewer is Dr. Thomas Soapes. Present for the interview are Dr. Ver Meulen and Dr. Soapes.

SOAPES: Dr. Ver Meulen, are you a native of Grand Rapids?

VER MEULEN: Most of my life, yes. I came here when I was in the second grade.

SOAPES: And you then went through the schools here in Grand Rapids?

VER MEULEN: I had one year in high school and then my parents moved to Waupun, Wisconsin. I finished high school there and then took a pre-med course at Rippon College and then at Marquette Dental School, graduated in 1924 and came back to Grand Rapids.

SOAPES: And you've been practicing dentistry here ever since.

VER MEULEN: Still am. Fifty-six years. I still practice full time.

SOAPES: What was it that started getting you interested in politics?

VER MEULEN: Well, it's a rather strange thing, an isolated incident that most people didn't pay any attention to and probably didn't care about I guess. I suppose I was kind of hepped up to do it because of all the graft and corruption that had been exposed by the federal grand juries in Grand Rapids and Michigan. Those were the days when Frank McKay dominated the situation, both the non-partisan city hall and the state of Michigan.

But to understand the story you've got to go back before World War I, really, when this community spawned four very

unusual political minded individuals, about the same age, contemporaries most of their lives. First was Ed Barnard. As a young man he became prosecuting attorney in Kent County. He left during the night and was disbarred from practice for five years. Two years later he quietly moved into Detroit and began to practice, nobody bothered him, and he eventually became Mr. McKay's lieutenant in charge of Wayne County and Detroit.

Mel McPherson, a farmer from new Lowell, a gentleman farmer really, was much more interested in politics, particularly in township and county, than he was in farming. An impressive looking individual, excellent speaker, sharp mind, he handled himself very well before an audience. Unlike most of his associates, he kept his nose reasonably clean when it comes to graft and that sort of thing. He didn't mind telling a falsehood, that wouldn't bother him any. But only once he really got himself in trouble and that was when he was caught voting tombstones in a local election.

A third was George Welsh. The Welsh family of four boys came to this country from Wales when George was a little shaver. He was orphaned early. Fortunately for George and his brothers he fell under the influence of Mr. Booth, editor and publisher of the Grand Rapids Press. Mr. Booth took a great interest in unfortunate boys. Deeply religious, an elder in the Presbyterian church, he conducted a private school in the Press building - - grades one through eight. They could buy lunch for very little there at the

lunch counter; they had a swimming pool; and he let them out at noon so that they could peddle papers, noon edition, and early enough to get the three o'clock edition on the street. The Welsh boys landed in that group and Mr. Booth was fascinated with George Welsh's keen mind and his ability to express himself. Did you ever read Bud Vestal's book, Jerry Ford Up Close? He gave a pretty good description of George.

I got this from Mr. Woodruff, for many years the managing editor of the Press. He started out under Mr. Booth. Mr. Woodruff said Mr. Booth was so fascinated by young George that he had his life planned out for him: he was going to eventually be the top man of the Press. And also he had ambitions for him to become a United States Senator. Then he caught George Welsh slipping confidential information to the Muskegon Chronicle, and that was the end of it. That was something Mr. Booth would not tolerate. And that was a weakness that plagued George all his life - - he couldn't quite be honest, otherwise he would have gone much farther than he did.

Always interested in politics, Mr. Welsh became a councilman soon after he was able to vote. Several years later he was elected to the [Michigan] House of Representatives. His second term, he became speaker of the house. See he had a lot of ability. In those days Michigan had a perennial lieutenant governor by the name of Loren Dickenson. Dickenson would file

his petitions every two years; no one would run against him because, I guess, they knew it was no use. After Mr. Welsh had been in the legislature for about four years, Dickenson announced he was stepping down and Welsh became lieutenant governor. Two years later, Dickenson decided to go back; so that ended Welsh. Dickenson served in that office for many, many years, becoming governor in 1939 when Governor Fitzgerald died only a couple weeks after taking office. That was a godsend for Michigan, believe me. He was 83 years old, but his mind was sharp and he did a good job.

Frank McKay, who became the dominate figure among those four, he was the product of the west side Lithuanian immigrant group. Now whether he was Lithuanian or not himself, I don't know. I've had people tell me who knew him as a kid and some said he was and some say he wasn't. But anyway, he ran a private bank on the west side, and he ingratiated himself to those people. Whenever they wanted to send money to the old country, why he took care of it. If they needed a mortgage to buy a home, why, he saw that they got it. And when they become citizens he saw that they knew how to vote. [Laughter] He completely dominated the Lithuanian vote, and it wasn't long until he had the Polish vote also. And that's kind of a frightening thing to see. When you look at records, we ran into a lot of that in our campaigns, where these communities precinct counts would come in 616 to 16, 500 to 20 and so on.

That along with six black precincts that were operated by the numbers racket was really the heart of McKay's power in this community.

SOAPES: Was he operating in the numbers racket himself?

VER MEULEN: No. Oh, no. He never operated anything himself.

SOAPES: But he had ties to those who did.

VER MEULEN: He sure did. You'll see a lot of that as we go along.

In 1916 he had enough influence so that the county board of supervisors created a job for him in the county building as a court commissioner in which his opponents said he had nothing to do, but he had a free office from which he sold insurance and real estate and so on. The Republican county convention was disorganized, few people paid any attention to it, and he saw an opportunity to organize and pick it up. And he organized meticulously, and the first thing you know he had control to it. In 1920 he began to promote candidates for the non-partisan city hall. In 1922 he was nominated and elected state treasurer. When he got in Lansing, he realized that the Wayne County, Detroit, organization and the Flint, Genessee County convention was also open for picking for anybody who would do some leg work. So with Ed Barnard, his old pal, lieutenant in charge of the Detroit area and Bill McKeighan a long-time Republican mayor of Flint, they organized Flint. And that became known as the McKay, Barnard, McKeighan triumverate that dominated state conventions for years. Mr. McKeighan fell

out when he had to leave during the night too. And he spent most of the rest of his life in Florida. He evaded trial when his doctors filed affidavits saying that his heart was so bad that a trip back to Michigan to stand trial would certainly cause his death. He never appeared in court until the last witness died. Then he appeared before Judge Reth who gave him a verbal shellacking that was a classic, but McKeighan could have cared less. It appeared in the front page of all the papers.

McKay saw the opportunity to make money -- he used to say, "I'm a businessman first, politician second." He organized any number of businesses. He sold surety bonds, and all the banks that wanted city and state deposits knew where to buy their bonds, as did road contractors and a host of others. That became a very profitable business. He organized the General Tire Company, and all the state trucks and cars ran on General tires. His lieutenant in charge of local operation, Jake Ryskamp, had a meat market which McKay was financially involved in. They had a monopoly on state institutions and all the restaurants in town because the restaurants feared state and city inspectors, you see. I could tell you a lot about that too, if you want to waste a lot of time which we haven't. I had a patient who worked in Ryskamp's Market. He used to say some of the stuff they sent to the prisons wasn't fit to eat -- it was just plain rotten. So one time I was making a radio speech I made that statement that some food Ryskamp sent to

public institutions was unfit to eat. The next day a couple of lawyers in the office: they wanted a copy of that talk. I said, "I don't need to give you a copy of that speech. Here, I'll give you a clipping of the Jackson paper." It told the story well. Ryskamp had just paid a fine for selling food unfit for consumption. The trial was held in Jackson. Mr. McKay also sold road graders and other equipment to the state. When McKay lost control, an independent audit was made of state business. Michigan found itself sole owner of a warehouse full of tires of such obsolete sizes and shapes as to be totally worthless.

In 1932, under the impact of the first Roosevelt landslide, the Democrats came in. Bill Comstock, who was a perennial candidate on the Democratic ticket when they had no chance, became governor and was a very good governor. He did a lot of cleaning up, and he was the brains behind the present liquor control system. They did a real hatchet job on Comstock, and two years later Fitzgerald, one of McKay's buddies who had been secretary of state, was the new governor. And the corruption that flowed in that administration has been documented in some books, really makes fascinating reading. I went down to the library Thursday morning when I knew you were coming to read the scrapbook, to get a few names refreshed in my memory, but the scrapbook has disappeared, which is par for the course under those conditions. There was a small scrapbook with just

a few odds and ends.

McKay then took charge of the liquor business. The distributors who did not buy through McKay's office found there was no market for their product. For those that paid \$1.00 a case commission, there was a market. They started a transfer company in Grand Rapids in which McKay was interested, had a monopoly on hauling all state liquor. The father-in-law of one of the owners was a close friend of mine. One day I was buying a suit of clothes from him and he said, "I'm awfully worried about that boy." He said, "They have a monopoly on hauling state liquor, and you know when you deal with McKay like that you're on very dangerous ground. I'm afraid something is going to happen." Later on it did.

When George Welsh saw McKay getting rich off manipulating state funds, he broke with McKay and he carried on a campaign against him. But he didn't have the money, didn't have the organization or the organizational know-how, and the state wasn't quite ready for overturning, they weren't informed, the average person. In 1928 he ran for governor on an anti-McKay ticket and got clobbered. In the meantime he and McKay were always fighting for control of city hall. They each had a slate - - sometimes one would be in the majority and sometimes another, and the feud was bitter. In 1936 Welsh announced that he was yielding to the demands of his many friends and was going to be a candidate for governor on the Democratic ticket. He was so overwhelmed by the humanitarian principles of Franklin Roosevelt

that he wanted to do what he could to improve the lot of this nation and he was going to put the welfare of the country ahead of his party and become a Democrat. Well, at first it looked like he was a shoo-in because he had a lot of support. But Postmaster General [James A.] Farley, who ran the show in Washington at that time, when he investigated he said, "No way, no way." So they brought in [Frank] Murphy, the governor of the Philippines -- he won.

I had a patient in thosedays "Teeny" Daniels. "Teeny" was a full time employee of McKay. One time in the office I said, "Teeny, just what is your job?"

He said, "You could call me a personnel director, I guess, in some places. McMckay goes on the theory that every man has his price, and my job is to find out his price, whether or not he is worth it and how to hold him in line in case he changed his mind."

I said, "How about George Welsh? Politics is his life. He's turned his back on Republicans; the Democrats don't want him. What's going to happen to George?"

"Oh, he's going to be alright.

He'll be the next mayor of Grand Rapids."

I said, "What brings that about?"

He said, "A couple weeks ago I invited George up to my cottage and also Ivan Hull." Ivan Hull was McKay's right hand man, also chairman of the Public Utilities Commission which had a wholesome influence on the truckers who were buying tires [Laughter].

"So I invited Ivan Hull and George to my cottage - - neither knew the other was coming - - and boy was that cool when they met each other. So I sat down with them and I said, 'Now listen, you guys, two of the dumbest politicians I know of are George Welsh and Frank McKay. You think you're smart but you are dumb. The only competition you have is each other. You wear yourselves out tearing each other apart when you should be joining hands and splitting the spoils. The only opposition you would have is that you generate yourself for public consumption. Now get smart!' Well, they bought the idea. They shook hands and next year George will be mayor and he'll be up front where he loves to be and see his pictures in the papers and McKay will be behind the scenes controlling things, where he does a master's job."

Then it wasn't long after that you begin to hear people suggesting that George Welsh put personal reasons behind and give himself to the betterment of this community and so on and so on. And eventually when the time came, he ran. His opponent was Dale Souter. They came out of the primaries, the two top ones. Right after the primary Mr. Souter found that he was not physically able to put on a campaign and needed the rest badly so he went to Florida, stayed there for a couple or three months, and George was easily elected without any opposition, really, and Dale Souter was appointed to a vacancy in the circuit court.

Hardly had George Welsh been seated in the mayor's

chair when they found two tragic situations in the community. The city lighting plant was obsolete and about to break down any minute and leave the city in the dark. Fortunately the old Burkey and Dale Generating plant was available, now owned by McKay, who bought everything that went under the sheriff's sale, liquidated in the name of McKay-DenBensky Company. And Mr. McKay was so public spirited he sold the obsolete plant to the city at the right price, he got rid of a white elephant. It never was used; it was eventually torn down and scrapped. We were told the water supply was bad. Everybody thought it was good, but it turned out very bad, so the politicians told us, and we had to go to Lake Michigan for water. So they hired the Consour Engineering Consultants from Chicago, who could come in and build a pipeline.

The Grand Rapids Professional Engineers Club took a dim view of Consour and Company. So they appointed a blue ribbon committee to audit the plans, and they handed down a critique that was a blister. They said that instead of producing water for Grand Rapids to the year 2000 it won't serve today's needs. It's built for two reasons: to consume electricity and to insure the building of another pipeline. Well, they really ignored the report.

They finished the pipeline, and when they went to turn on the water there was no intake off the lake. The company said they had built one; the divers told how they built it. But there was no intake. So they came to the conclusion that the big

storm of November 11 had blown it away. [Laughter] So they voted another bond issue to build a new intake.

Then all of a sudden something happened that began to make people wonder a little bit but not enough for them to get up and do anything about it. The government, I believe it was the Department of Justice, they said that the Purple Gang out of Detroit had moved its headquarters into Grand Rapids, and they gave the address. People didn't want that around here. Then all of a sudden, a front page story, some hoodlums that felt they had been doublecrossed by McKay had decided to give him the treatment. They're waiting for him one morning with deer rifles in an apartment across the street. One of them got cold feet and tipped off the police. Now McKay always runs around with three men, body guards, which the Department of Justice said were members of the Sugar House mob from Detroit. Then the government hit him up with a rash of indictments for various types of fraud. They accused him of rigging the bond issue for the pipeline in conjunction with Stranahan and Harris Company of Toledo. I had a brother in the bonding business in Milwaukee, and I asked him if they were going to bid on it. He said, "Not with Stranahan and Harris. You know there is some skulduggery." And then they indicted him again for rigging the bond issue for the Blue Water Bridge from Detroit to Windsor and of pocketing a sizable contribution that the Ford Motor Company gave to the Republican party. And a real block buster was when they showed that all liquor sold in Michigan cost an

extra dollar a case paid to McKay. Only when sold through McKay's office could a market be found for their product. Well, then they employed Eugene Gary and Associates of New York, well-known criminal lawyers, and they put on quite a show. They marched the jury up hill and down hill until they didn't know where they were, and it always come out a hung jury. But it was excellent publicity for those who wanted to get rid of McKay.

The thing that got me into politics - - and you might say was a first step to getting Jerry in the White House - - was a situation that existed at Sunshine Sanitarium, owned by the city of Grand Rapids. TB was a big problem in those days, before the wonder drugs. There were two doctors on the hospital staff, Eugene Nesbitt in charge, and he was a drunk. He would go on benders for months at a time. And a much younger man, who was recovering from TB himself and could work half days - - he was very competent. One afternoon there was a little girl in the office from the nursing staff, and I said, "Do you ever have any problems with Dr. Nesbitt when he is on his drunken spree?" And boy she got pale and she clammed up and she didn't say anything. I knew she had been brain washed. My next patient was a twenty year veteran of the Grand Rapids police department. And I said, "Henry, I hear that you police officers often pick up Dr. Nesbitt for being drunk and disorderly in the street but you're not allowed to arrest him; you have to take him home and put him to bed. Is that vicious gossip or is there any truth to it?"

He said, "It's as true as I'm sitting here in this chair. Most police officers have had him. My partner and I had him a couple weeks ago. We were driving down Michigan Street in a cruiser when a call came over the police radio about a drunk trying to clean out a tavern, and we were right in front of the tavern when the call came. So I walked in to see a big good looking guy swinging around at everybody. I put my hand on his shoulder and I said, 'Come on my friend let's get you out of here before you get hurt.' He said, 'This is for you coper,' and he put one on my chin. And I said, 'This is for you drunk,' and I put one on his head. As we approached the police headquarters he came to and he said, 'Let me up officer. Let me up; I'll be good.' And I said, 'Sure you will. I weigh 240 pounds and my foot is on your neck and your choices are really quite limited.' Going in to police headquarters we hauled him out of the cruiser, and the sergeant in charge panicked. He said, 'My God, you've got the doctor. He's protected. We can't arrest him; we'll get in trouble; we'll get in serious trouble. Get a cab and get him home. We can't arrest him.' So we called a cab and sent him home. You know that's the story of his life. If you and I were doing half the things he did, we would never get out of jail. But the boys operating behind the scenes really take care of him."

And I said, "That's a heck of a kind of doctor to be taking care of the critically ill patients."

A couple days later both newspapers carried screaming headlines all across the front page. A great crowd of people jammed the City Commission rooms representing most of the churches, PTAs, Women's Club and so on. They demanded a clean up of the medical situation at the Sanitarium. They had gathered evidence well. It was brutally incriminating. But these seven commissioners sat there like seven bumps on a log. They knew why he was there, and they weren't going to interfere. George Welsh was mayor, must have been tipped off ahead of time, and he had a prepared speech that was a beauty. He told the women to go home and learn to bake bread and take care of the kids, the ministers to go out and preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and save sinners, and they'll run the town - - meeting adjourned.

So the next day I called up the fellow who was in charge of the project and I said, "What's your next step?" I want to help you. He said, "There will be no next step. We wouldn't take that kind of abuse from anybody if they all died. If that's what Grand Rapids wants, they can have it, I'm through." So, like everybody else, I kind of forgot it.

A couple months later I had a real shocker. I had an associate in my office in the general practice of medicine, Andy Van Solkemer. He had a seventeen year old sister who was a patient at the sanitarium. I was working at the chair when in comes Andy all upset, wringing his hands and stammering like a magpie and saying

"Oh Bill, come and talk to me, come and talk to me. I've got to have someone to talk to: I never needed anybody like I need you now."

I excused myself from my patient and went in his office sat down and closed the door and said, "Andy, what's the problem?"

He says, "You know Dr. Gaikema at the sanitarium?" He was the one that was recovering from TB.

I said, "Yes, very well."

"He just walked in here and he says, 'Andy do you love your little sister? Do you want her to live or do you just as soon she died and have it over with?'"

'Why do you ask such a stupid question as that? Of course, I want Effie to live.'

'Andy, your sister is dying.'

"No, it can't be. Just two weeks ago I talked to Nesbitt and he said, 'Your sister is making fantastic recovery, absolutely fantastic. We're very proud of that case. Don't worry about her; she's going to be alright.' Now you say she's dying."

'Andy, the chief's been drunk so long he's lost all contact with reality. He hasn't the slightest idea who your sister is. Now her only chance of survival, it's not a very good chance either, get her down to the University of Michigan Medical Center, get her in Dr. Alexander's hands for some surgery. She might make it; I don't know, she might, she's on the borderline. Goodby, and don't tell anybody I've talked out of turn because all my family has

to live on the \$100 a month I get up there and a doctor in my poor health can't get any kind of a job. But I can't sleep at night with Effie dying.' He said, "What will I do?"

I said, "Andy, just sit down and think. Let's go back a couple years. When Dr. Gaikema first went to the hospital, you talked to me about that. You said 'One of the tragedies of Dr. Gaikema's illness is that he has one of the best medical minds in this community and he can't use it; he's too sick.' I said, "Do you remember that?"

"Oh yes."

I said, "Do you still believe that?"

"I certainly do."

"Well, then do as he tells you. This afternoon, not some time in the future, but right now this afternoon close your office, get your sister down to Ann Arbor as fast as your wheels can turn."

"Yes," he said, "I'll do that." He did it.

So about three weeks later she was ready for her surgery. Dr. Van Solkemer spent three days with his sister at the time of the operation. He came back all shook up. He said, "I had a terrible experience Tuesday. I scrubbed in and watched this marvelous Dr. Alexander operate on Effie. And right in the middle of the operation he dropped his instruments on his tray and he shook his fists in my face and said, 'Give it to me straight. Who is responsible for the sister of a doctor getting in this shape?' I said, 'I am. I had

confidence in Dr. Nesbitt and it was a terrible mistake.' 'Oh,' he says, 'Dr. Nesbitt, a drunken bum. Grand Rapids, "Little Jerusalem." Everywhere you look in Grand Rapids, you see a church. They fill them up Sunday morning, Sunday evening, prayer meeting in the middle of the week. You're always praying for something over there in Grand Rapids and you haven't got the guts to stand up for what's right.' And he pointed to Effie, and said, 'You would rather let your loved one rot and die rather than tangle with crooked politicians. What kind of a town have you got there? What kind of a message comes from the pulpits of your churches? May the good Lord have mercy on your whole damn bunch, because when the judgment day rolls around a just God will never forget what you people are doing to the sick and unfortunate in your community.'" And he said, "I haven't been able to sleep since. People are dying up there; they're dying one after another; they're dying of neglect and nobody cares, nobody does anything. Why doesn't somebody do something?"

I said, "Andy, why don't you do something."

He said, "I don't know how."

I said, "Why don't I do something? I don't know how either but I'm going to do it."

"How are you going to do it?"

I said, "I'm going to break that damn machine."

"What do you know about politics?"

I said, "Nothing."

"What are you going to do about it?"

I said, "I don't know, but I'm going to do something."

I joined a meek little organization that were calling themselves "The Voices of the Voters." They tried to elect an independent councilman here and there, but none of them successful. But I worked with those people two years, and I got to know something about the jungle and a lot of people who knew their way around and some people who just wanted to do something, had tried to do something and couldn't, particularly Attorney Paul Strawhecker, who formed the Greater Republican Club a few years ago to combat it and got soundly thrashed. So, gee, I thought, if I could get ten guys I think I could take them. I knew enough about them and I knew their weak spots. And people who understood politics around the state insisted that if McKay would loose control of Grand Rapids and Kent County, he'd loose Wayne - - no way he could hold it. So I got to thinking - - who in the world to go and see.

One day it snowed, oh gosh, every patient that I had on the books called in the morning and said, "I can't get through." And I thought this would be a good day to go down and see Paul Goebel. If anyone would give a movement respect it would be Paul. So I went down and talked to him and he says, "Who else you got lined up?"

I said, "Nobody, just me."

And he said, "Well, now you got me. Now you've got two."

And I'll tell you Bill, win, loose or draw, I'm with you all the way, all the way. Do you know that blond young fellow coming in the front door?"

I said, "No, I don't."

He said, "That's Jerry Ford. He's come back to Grand Rapids to open a law office here. He'd be a dandy; he'd be a natural."

So we told Jerry what we were trying to do, and he said, "I'd like to be the third one to join the group."

I said, "Jerry, not so fast. Think it over. This may not be the place for you."

And he said, "Why not?"

I said, "The pressure is going to be intense. You're going to lose clients. Can you afford it?"

He says, "What do you mean? I haven't got any clients. All I've got is an office." And he said, "I want to make this clear: Jerry Ford does not back down on a moral question. I'm not that way. I'll do anything before I'll do that."

I said, "You can't beat that." So we got three.

Paul and I met many times at noon. We must have gone over several hundred names. And boy, we picked them with care. And when we had ten, we met in my office one day. None of the guys knew anything about politics. I knew more than the rest of them did, but I didn't know much.

SOAPES: What criteria did you use to pick these ten people?

VER MEULEN: Number one, they had to stand high in the community so when people would see their names in the paper, they'd say that it's got to be good or these guys wouldn't be on the thing. They had to be able to get up and make a talk. They had to own their own business. That was really one of the difficult problems we ran into a lot in recruiting delegates. They'd start with enthusiasm and then their boss would say, "Hey, you, no way, no way." And they had to be prosperous enough so that if they lost a client or a customer they wouldn't panic.

We got quite a group. Stan [Stanton] Todd, who was district representative of the American Radiator Company. Ekdal Buys, who was a young fellow, probably thirty. And I was the old man of the group, and I was only forty. Then Edsko Heckman, whose family owned a prosperous furniture factory. Wencel Milanowski, a Polish attorney who we had to drop because of his Polish connections. Polish leaders were all in McKay's corner. Jack [John D.] Hibbard, who was probably the best fund raiser for a good cause as this town ever had. And he was a godsend. We always managed to get our bills paid. Irv [Irving] Pennington, chairman of the Board of Supervisors, Kent County. He had been severely damaged by some skulduggery and he was anxious to go to work. Fred Searl, a prominent attorney, who died recently, a judge. Then we recruited Fred Wetmore, an 80 year old attorney, sharp as a tack, who had spent eight years as U.S. District Attorney.

He knew politics; he knew the situation; and he was invaluable. And he could lay the invectives that would burn asbestos, boy, I'll tell you. He was something else. And he kept encouraging us.

We tried to educate ourselves the best we could before we even came out in public. We met every Friday night in a room in Goebel's basement. We had some mighty good teachers. Newspaper reporters, they know everything that's going on, and believe me they do. A former state insurance commissioner, two former prosecutors, they were among the most valuable that we had.

We finally decided to set our target date at September 15, 1942. Now the problem we had which we faced was this: Kent County had 142 precincts and each precinct was entitled to elect one delegate to the county convention. You could become a candidate by filing a petition with 25 names, registered voters in your precinct. Then you would go on a ballot just like for any other office. McKay for years had filed a slate -- they were all officers and employees in banks looking for public deposits, city and county employees, local merchants that had enjoyed a monopoly. They all had one thing in common: it was financially beneficial to stay loyal to McKay. And we had no experience. We were going to buck hundreds of paid workers, unlimited amount of cash, and all we could pick up was small contributions here and there, although we did get an anonymous \$1,000 dollars from Detroit once which was really a godsend. So we filled the first

half of the slate from people we knew, from friends, and from people who had a reputation of being militant anti-McKay. After we got the slate half-filled, the going was pretty tough. We had money enough to hire a full time organizer, Clair Kuiper, and he did a marvelous job for us. Areas where the gambling and vice rackets operated with a minimum of police interference, you couldn't even get anybody to talk to you. We met the deadline with 120; that gave them 22 [precincts] that they didn't have to contest for.

The next day they lowered the boom on everybody they could, and twenty withdrew. So we had just 100. Everybody gave us an "A" for effort, but nobody expected to get anywhere. Believe it or not we won almost as many delegates to state convention as McKay did. And that was a boon, and his control blew up on the other side of the state. So for the first time in many years, he didn't pick the Republican slate.

McKay had a standard procedure when anybody worked against him. The first thing, you would be called on and offered some kind of a deal - - come join the happy family, one hand washes another, and there's plenty for everybody - - amazing what people would go for that one. If that didn't work then you got threats - - threats to your business, your safety and your job and your family, through the mail and over the telephone. We went through a lot of that. And then if that didn't work then he had a weekly newspaper which nobody subscribed for but everybody got. It was supported

entirely by sandbag advertising. The important part of this paper, and really the only reason for printing, was the front page editorial, printed in large, bold-face type. He used it to slam anybody who he was made at at the time. I was the target of that thing hundreds of times in the fourteen years it took us to really wipe the machine out. And that was a remarkable thing - - our guys kept going fourteen years without anybody falling out. McKay would brag to anyone who would listen, he could drive most anyone to cover with public ridicule. The Republican county chairman 1942 - 1944 was attorney Oscar Ware. McKay was furious with his conduct in office. He called the county committee together consisting of 242 members appointed by the office holders - - which meant a list prepared in his office. He ordered him to depose Mr. Ware and approve a committee of four to conduct the party business - - the four, Frank McKay, Ivan Hull, Jake Ryskamp and Mr. McPherson. The motion easily passed but being illegal it amounted to nothing.

A few days before the election in '42, I had a caller from the Detroit News, a political writer. He said, "How do you expect to come out on the fifteenth?"

I said, "We expect to win."

He says, "You know better than that. You haven't got enough delegate candidates. But I think I know what you're planning on. Quite a number of these unopposed delegates are telling you that what you're doing is what the community needs

most and if you show a good count he'll join you."

And I said, "Yes, there's quite a number of those people."

"Not one will stick with you not one. I'm not criticizing you for falling for that because you can't call a man a liar until he's proven he's a liar, but they're all lying to you." And he was right. Only one guy stood. He said, "What we want to know in Detroit is this just a flash in the pan: are you having a lot of fun, going to stick it out this time and then quit, or are you laying the ground work for a long up-hill pull?"

I said, "Jerry Ford phrases it beautifully. He said, 'We're bound to win if for no other reason - - we're younger and we'll live longer and we'll be back in '44 and we'll plug up our weak spots.'"

He says, "If you do that, McKay is finished and nobody knows that better than he does. I've spent the last two days here hanging around gambling joints and down around the 'red light' district and other places where protection is the staff of life. They're panicky. I know all your boy's reputation. You're the first one I've seen," and he named them all. He says, "They can't find anything to hang on them."

And I said, "No, they're clean; they were picked because they were clean."

He said, "You've all been offered deals, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"You've all been threatened."

"Sure have."

"And you've been smeared in the paper. McKay always brags that he can drive anybody under cover with criticism and public ridicule. All you fellows do is read the paper and laugh. Now they don't know what to do."

Well, both sides began to get ready for '44 long before '44. Four of our original ten are in the armed forces, and that left us very short. And I was in a heck of a mess -- almost half our dentists were in the armed forces. And I was working day and night and Sunday afternoons at one of the hospitals. But the general opinion among people was if we'd keep pitching we'd win. So it was much easier to get delegates. A lot of people who had shied away volunteered now, and we got rid of all the weak ones. And that time we had 130, and only one panicked of that group. He was a former McKay hand, claimed he had been converted and wanted to help us. Well, we should have known better than to buy that. But anyway, we went with around 130. Ample funds came in to carry on our campaign.

We had often heard that McKay's delegate petitions were usually phony, filled in around a table copying names. We couldn't prove it, but we heard the gossip. We knew ours would be checked with a fine-tooth comb; so we were meticulous in putting

them together. The day after filing, Jay Lindsay, one of McKay's attorneys, went into the county clerk's office and checked our petitions. And he was amazed at how many fraudulent petitions we had - - "Seventy," he said, "It is very evident that they were not circulated by the persons who signed a circular." So he appealed to Judge Brown of the circuit court, who was an old push-over for McKay, and he pointed out to Judge Brown that all these seventy petitions were void. And the judge, he looked at them over his bifocals, "Oh yes, it is very evident," he said, "those are void. We'll throw them out."

Well he had to give us forty-eight hours for defense. So, with Mr. Kuiper directing things, we got our wives out and down to the county building and we began to check theirs. And an hour after we began to check Mr. Kuiper called me and said, "Keep your shirt on. We checked ten and seven are as phony as a three dollar bill." And they knew it. And then right after Clair called, their attorney called - - they would like to talk it over. They'd drop it if we would let them hand pick fifteen names. "No way," I said, "I'm not selling anybody down the river - - not one to say nothing about fifteen." At noon, they'd take ten. At five o'clock they'd do it for five.

Then we had to appear before Judge Brown and the attorney Lindsay, went to our attorney, old Fred Wetmore and he said, "Freddie, what kind of a deal will you make with us?"

He said, "We aren't dealing anything." He says, "We will accept the rules you laid down. We loose one and you loose seventy and the ball game is over."

He turned to Judge Brown, "Your honor, I think they should all stand."

He says, "They should all stand."

Well that election was a disaster for McKay. He won almost nothing. He didn't even bother to send a delegate to the convention. But the day after the election we come darn near loosing it again. The delegates did not elect their own county chairman as they do now. They were running under an old antique law that the sixteen nominees for public office on the Republican ticket would choose the county officers. And we found that eleven of the sixteen had pledged their vote to Mel McPherson, McKay's right-hand man in charge of rural areas. Well, we wanted Jerry Ford's father, and we thought he had been sold on being a candidate. Fred Searl, who is a friend of McPhersons and also his personal attorney who was meeting with us in the Penn Club trying to decide what in the world we could do to combat those eleven votes. He called McPherson on the phone from the club. He said, "Mel, that is the most corrupt, dishonest piece of politicking I can ever remember."

I said, "You tied yourself irrevokably to McKay. You've lost overwhelmingly, and now you want to gain control

through the backdoor."

He says, "It is going to wreck the party, and it's going to make you look awfully bad to all these citizens, and the boys will set up another 'rump' organization. You may not even get to go to Detroit as a delegate. You will have nothing to say; you are going to look ridiculous. You'd better get smart." He withdrew.

On Saturday afternoon Mr. Ford called me and he said, "I've decided I will not be a candidate under any conditions."

I said, "Mr. Ford, the election is Monday morning."

"I don't care. You got two days to find somebody."

I said, "That means that I'm going to have to do it, and I shouldn't."

"Nope, no way will I do it."

Sunday afternoon he called me back. He said, "Dorothy and I just came back from church. There was a special delivery letter in the mail from Jerry in the South Pacific and I'll read you a paragraph. 'Dad, I can't get it out of my mind, how are the boys doing in the battle against McKay? With so many of us gone have they got the manpower to win? If they ever ask you to do anything, don't hesitate, just do it, and when I come back I'll take your place.' Now, Bill, I want that job!" Well, he got it.

At that time there was another affair going on that helped us considerably. It's known in the history of Michigan as

the Carr-Sigler Grand Jury. It had long been rumored that if you wanted to get an important bill through the legislature you had to grease some palms. It was rumor - - nobody had any proof of it, but that was the general feeling. There were a lot of special interest bills up in the legislature, and there were two that were especially noteworthy. One was to liberalize the gambling laws of Michigan, and another one was to change the banking laws. Now the state constitution, because of the history of banking in Michigan, required that no bank legislation may go through with less than two-thirds of both houses, and the banks couldn't get the two-thirds vote. So the stories were going around that there was vote buying by the banks.

Then one day one little guy whom most people never heard of, a legislator from the center of the state found 500 dollars in his coat pocket. He said he knew what that was for - - that was to buy his vote for the bank bill, and he was furious. He went around making speeches wherever people would listen. He said this was governing Michigan - - 500 bucks for one lousy vote. And in those days 500 dollars was a lot of money. You could buy a pretty good car for that, you know. So he demanded a grand jury. So the pressure was so great that they did it. Judge Leland Carr, a highly respected and able circuit judge from the central part of the state was put in charge. He hired Kim Sigler a flamboyant high-powered trial lawyer - - one of these self-made lawyers, had

little education but had a lot of natural ability. And he parlayed himself into the governorship with this.

One of the first ones to be called, a fellow by the name of Slattery. He was vice-president of Michigan National Bank. He couldn't remember anything; his memory went blank. But Judge Carr had a treatment for those guys with poor memories: he put them in solitary and their memories usually improved like everything. But this guy couldn't remember anything. He sat through the whole trial month after month until the grand jury was finally discharged and he went back to work at the bank.

The next one to be called up was Earl Munshaw, state senator from the city of Grand Rapids. He came home and drove his car in the garage and left the motor running - - one senator was gone. A couple days later Senator Callahan from Big Rapids was called up. He was indicted. He called a press conference and said he was suing the State of Michigan and all of them for half a million dollars. Then he went down in the basement and put a bullet through his head. Couple days later, Mr. Bylinga, President of the Star Transfer was called up. Star had a monopoly on all state liquor hauling. He drove his car into a fast freight. The coroner's jury said suicide.

And people began to talk about Senator Hooper from Vandalia. They said if he is called and opens up, you will see something hit the fan. Well, he was called up on a Wednesday.

I don't know what he said - - it was a secret one man grand jury - - but we do know that it so upset Judge Carr that he ordered the state police to give him round-the-clock protection until Monday morning when he could appear before a court of record. Senator Hooper would have none of it. He said, "Leave me alone. Nobody is going to bother me. I don't want any police officers hanging around me with their guns." So he went home. His car was forced off the road outside of Jackson. He was machine-gunned and his car was burned. Nobody ever was convicted of the murder, but later on the state police announced they knew who the killers were - - they were two members of the Purple Gang who were serving long terms in Jackson prison, were secretly let out and they were secretly let in so they had a perfect alibi. Well, then there was an investigation of the conduct of the state prison and they found that that was a very common procedure, to let people out on special duty. [Laughter].

That helped us of course. There was never any evidence that showed that McKay ordered the killing, but a lot of people thought he did, which was pretty near as good. Bud Vestal's book talks about that.

Then came 1945 and '46. I felt that with the shellacking McKay got in '44 and the revelations of the grand jury and being extremely wealthy, he just might decide to retire

from politics. But in the middle of December 1945 I found they had no intention of retiring. Paul Goebel had been in the Navy several years. He had wound up the last year as chief engineer of the aircraft carrier Shangri-La, which was the biggest carrier afloat at that time. I asked him one time how a civilian like that got to be chief engineer with professional naval engineers all around. He said it was a rather unusual situation. He said, "Our engine went dead up in the Japanese Sea, and we floated like sitting ducks for three days while they were repairing the engines. Then it came time to start them and they couldn't get them started and they couldn't find the manual prepared by the builders. So the skipper was nuts, and he turned to me and he said, 'You got any ideas, Goebel?' And I said, 'Yes. I memorized the manual before we ever left port' I said to, do this; do this; do this. And when he did, she started. The old man says, 'You are now the chief engineer.'" [Laughter]

But he takes things so very seriously. He came back and he was all shook up. He had been back about a week when his sister-in-law called me and said, "Do you know Paul's home?"

I said, "No."

"Been home about a week."

I said, "Funny, I hadn't heard from him."

She said, "Nobody's heard from him. He just sits in the house, looking out the window; he's shook up. He didn't even listen to the football game Saturday afternoon on the radio. He

needs help. That's not the Goebel we know. I wish you'd go over and talk to him; get some of the other boys; see if you can't get him out of the rut."

So I called him and I said, "Gee, Paul, I'm glad you're home."

He says, "Do you want to come over tonight?" We yacked around for two or three hours, and when I got ready to leave he said, "Bill, I got to tell you something -- hardest thing I ever had to tell anybody. You know when I left I promised faithfully that I'd join up with you when I got back. I can't do it, I could no more go through a rough political campaign than I can fly."

I said, "Oh, forget it Goebel; don't even think about it. All the boys will be home before long and we'll get together and we'll decide where we go from there."

About ten o'clock next morning he was on the phone. He says, "I don't care what you are doing, we've got to have lunch together."

I said, "OK, Paul, I'll pick you up about five minutes after twelve; I'll pull up in front of the store." So I pulled up and there he was over on the corner pacing back and forth like a lion in a cage. I said, "Goebel, what's the story?"

"I came down to the store this morning for the first time. I wasn't here ten minutes -- you know this place has been

staked out. They were waiting for me. Big Jake walks inⁿ
-- that was the lieutenant in charge of local rackets -- with
a snarl. He said, 'Well, Paul, I see you are back.' I said, 'Yep,
Jake, I'm back and glad to be back.' 'Well,' he said 'now that
you're back you going to mess around in politics again?' 'Oh,'
I said, 'I might Jake, and I might not. What's it to you if I
do or if I don't?' 'Well, I'll tell you what's it to me. And
remember, when I make a statement, there's money back of it. And
I mean business. We've rented some space across the street in the
Porter Building. We're going to put in a sporting goods store;
we're going to run you competition. And if you get in politics
we're going to give stuff away and we're going to break you. So
talk it over with your partner Thorne Brown and see how you would
like to be known as a once prosperous merchant but now bankrupt.
Do you understand me, Paul?' 'Yes, Jake, I understand you. And I
want you to understand me. You see this big fist? On the count of
three it goes right on the end of your goddamn chin -- one, two,
and you should have seen the fat ass go through that door. He
couldn't get out of there fast enough.' [Laughter]

Well, that's the kind of stuff they pulled all the
time. I could go on all night about different experiences. Stan
Todd was representative of the American Radiator Company. The
first campaign as he and I were writing some publicity for the
next day's paper, Western Union delivered him a night letter from

the president of his company. He said, "I have been asked to meet with Eugene Garey, attorney from New York, to discuss the unusual activities of one of our employees, Stanton Todd, of Grand Rapids. He's coming in in a couple days. Send a night letter right back: What is the unusual situation? Do you have family troubles; money problems; what is it? We want to know; we will help in any way we can." Then he wrote down an answer. He said, "I'm one of a group of young fellows that are trying to break the hold of Frank McKay on the Republican party in Michigan. Eugene Garey is the attorney who has been defending all these graft cases. I imagine he is going to lay down the law -- fire me or else." He got one right back from the president and he said, "You are right. Mr. Garey said fire Stanton Todd or American Radiator will sell no more to the state of Michigan. Stan, may the good Lord bless you -- keep it up." [Laughter] Most employers, companies, weren't that way, they were the other way.

As the '46 campaign came close, we had so many young guys home from the service who wanted to help that we didn't know what to do with all of them. And we had ample money. McKay had his petition drawn up and they took a look and said, no thanks, and they withdraw theirs. In 1948 they began work again for another campaign -- the same old people, same old hacks, but they changed their name to the "War Veterans Republican Precinct Organization" as a kind of a sop to the veterans.

We had another problem: of the sixteen Republican office holders, there were some that were wobbly, they would go whichever way they thought would do them the most good, anxious to keep out of a primary fight. And there were three that were militantly pro-McKay. They did everything they could to name the county chairman that he wanted. And we had to do something about that. There were several others that were anti-McKay; so McKay put a candidate against them in the primaries. So we had to get on the ball. We got John Martin to run against the state senator on the west side, and Jerry Ford ran for Congress. Louis Schooly, a legless Marine from Okinawa, took on Charley Feenstra, who was the most militant pro-McKay man in the bunch. Dr. Dick Boelkins ran for coroner against Dr. LeRoy. All our people won. So we had eleven or twelve sure votes for chairman. But they did better in '48 than they did in '44 in the delegate race, and they were full of steam. They thought they were going to make a comeback in 1950.

The assessing system in Grand Rapids was so crooked it didn't depend on what you owned but on who you were. So that got under the skin of a lot of real estate people, and so they put on a referendum petition and forced a public vote for an honest to goodness assessing system that required the assessor to have a certain amount of professional experience - - it couldn't be just turned over to a political hack. That passed, and they refused to put it into effect. That stirred up all these real estate people and others who had worked

so hard for it. So they had a recall election, and recalled Welsh and recalled all but two Polish men on the west side that stood with McKay.

Then it came -- who was going to run for mayor? When they went off to get recall petitions, that was a new young group that had never gotten involved. They had a meeting downtown. They wanted everybody who was interested to come down and take some recall petitions; so I went down. They saw me come in and they said come on let's have a little talk. They said, "This is an amateur movement. You're looked upon as a pro around here. Please leave."

I said, "OK, but if you need me holler."

They had to have sixteen thousand signatures. People who wanted to sign were supposed to leave their lights on -- the lights were on all over town. People went out and some filled up the petitions, some got one or two names. They brought them downtown. When they counted they had eight thousand. They were only half way. Then the interest died down and they were way short. So then the boys who had asked me to leave came in the office and said, "Can you help us?"

I said, "Give me the petitions." I was county chairman then. I went down to the office and I said to our employees. "Now you know every anti-McKay man in this town practically. See that they get as many petitions as they will take -- gee, we had twenty-six thousand right like that."

When they circulated all the petitioners, the signers -- "Who do you want as your candidate for mayor?" Well Goebel was one of the people listed, and he didn't want to be mayor. He didn't, oh, he was so upset about that. He was afraid he might win it. The day they were going to count the ballots, I called him up the night before. I said, "Goebel, you are all upset aren't you?"

"Yep."

"I got a couple good hounds so let's go out hunting tomorrow." So we went up north. We weren't out there a half hour and he was sick; he was real sick; he was just emotionally upset. He was afraid he would win that, and he didn't want to win it and he wouldn't turn it down -- he didn't want it. He was so upset they took him to the hospital -- his ulcers were kicking up. So the next day he made a wonderful statement from the hospital bed, said that he'd be in there pitching. And he did a marvelous job over there. He served there six years. They rebuilt the water system; rebuilt the sewer system. There were times in the summer time when you couldn't get near the Grand Rapids river it smelled so bad. These professional political machines keep their taxes down by ignoring capital improvements -- "We fight to keep your taxes down." After a while, if you don't fix the roof, you know, you're going to have to have a new roof. He also drove out the big time vice and gambling operations and reorganized the police

department. One of the first things Goebel did after taking the office of mayor was to reorganize the police department. Put an end to politically protected gambling and vice rackets. This cut off much of their income. The people in the food business no longer had to fear persecution by the inspectors if they didn't buy from the Ryskamp Market in which McKay had an interest. In a few months Ryskamp was bankrupt.

After Jerry was in Congress about a few months, my wife and I visited there for a couple days and we were in his office visiting with his secretary, a man who had worked for congressmen for thirty-five years and Jerry had hired him, temporary. I said, "How is my friend doing?" He said, "In my thirty-five years I've seen very few honest to goodness leaders in Congress, but here's one. He's going to go a long way." Couple months later there was an article in Time magazine on the Washington scene, and it said "For those who would like to predict the future keep your eye on Jerry Ford from Grand Rapids, with a few breaks he could go all the way." So then Jerry and Betty and my wife and I went to New York for a couple days and so I don't have to tell you it was a thrill to do down on the family chartered plane and see him sworn in as Vice-President.

SOAPES: In '46, after he's returned from the war, he was doing some work with your group, wasn't he? - -

VER MEULEN: Yes, he was president.

SOAPES: What did he do actually for your group during that period?

VER MEULEN: Well, same things we all did - - went out in the precincts that were vacant and drummed up organization, made speeches, raised money.

SOAPES: Your initial strategy was to work on the party organization, party structure. Why did you decide to go for that rather than going for the office holders right away?

VER MEULEN: We figured if we had the organization, we could get the office holders, and our group was a springboard for a lot of good men, a lot of good men. A lot of them became judges, city commissioners, county commissioners, members of the legislature, members of the board of regents of the University of Michigan, Michigan State. We produced a lot of good people. We gave them the necessary start and know-how. We elected the first black judge Michigan ever had. He is still in office.

SOAPES: While you were mostly Republicans working on a Republican organization here, were you also drawing some support from Democrats?

VER MEULEN: Oh, yes, a lot of Democrats. You see the Democratic party, until the UAW [United Auto Workers] took it over, was not even of nuisance value. Will Rogers phrased it beautifully one time when making a speech here, he said, "I find Democrats are so scarce they had to close the season on them." [Laughter] Well,

there were a few people who said we ought to go through the Democratic party, that would never have worked.

SOAPES: There was another organization Mrs. [Siegel] Judd put together, wasn't there?

VER MEULEN: That was the Citizen's Action that promoted Goebel for mayor. It was her organization that master-minded the gathering the signatures for the referendum on the assessing system, and they called themselves "Citizens Action." It was pretty much our group with a different name.

SOAPES: Your fund raising, of course, that's always a difficult thing, and you mentioned that Hibbard was the principal fund raiser. What were your best sources of funds?

VER MEULEN: Fifty and a hundred dollars apiece. We would call people that we knew or were interested: Can you give us fifty; can you raise a hundred? We never had over four thousand dollars. But today with the high cost you couldn't do anything with four thousand dollars.

SOAPES: Were you able to get this from a broad spectrum of people here in town?

VER MEULEN: Yes, yes. In 1944 we got quite a lot of money from John Blodgett, who was a multimillionaire, who had been national committeeman. But John Blodgett always supported McKay because, he said, "Immoral as he is, he had the organization and he can win." Well, he found that Frank McKay was not supporting the Republican

state ticket; he was out for supporting the Democrats, he found that, there was no question about it, he didn't want Harry Kelly as governor and that upset old John Blodgett terribly. And he said, "From now on I'm in your corner."

SOAPES: Did any national Republican figures take note of what you were doing here and lend any sort of assistance?

VER MEULEN: Nationally, no. I can remember Senator [Arthur] Vandenberg was at his height then, but he wouldn't have anything to do with us during the difficult years. After we won, yes, they were all here Senator [Joseph] Ball was here, Senator [Robert A.] Taft, [Leverett] Saltonstall, President Eisenhower before he was president. And that was one of the nice things about being chairman, you met people that you've read about that you wouldn't have met otherwise.

SOAPES: Did Vanderberg have any comity with McKay?

VER MEULEN: That is hard to say. Not openly at least, but neither did he come out and fight him.

SOAPES: The way McKay worked, would he really have been interested in a United States senator? Was that important to his organization?

VER MEULEN: Probably not. Lee Woodruff claimed that when McKay got into national politics he got in trouble, he got in over his head. Now that was his opinion.

SOAPES: Was McKay personally an impressive man? If he were

to walk into a room, was he the type that got everybody's attention just by stepping in?

VER MEULEN: No. He was a fellow who extremely hated those who fought against him. One time at a county convention we were calling the roll, and he had hoped that he would do better than he did. I had a phone call that said that I was wanted on the telephone in Judge Brown's office. There was McKay sitting at the desk - - gee the hatred that was in his eyes, scared you. I felt he could murder me.

A fellow by the name of Guy Jenkins was a political writer for the Booth newspapers, and he used to take off on McKay something terrible sometimes, and McKay hated him. One evening I was walking down Monroe Street and passed the Pantlind Hotel, Guy Jenkins was just standing there passing the time. I said, "Hi, Guy."

He says, "Get out of here, you rat, I have no use for you: I don't want to talk to you; don't want to see you."

I said, "What did I do now?"

"Why you robbed me of my prize possession."

"What was that."

He says, "Frank McKay just walked by. He says, 'You know, Guy, I used to hate you more than any man in the state of Michigan, but you're second fiddle now, Doc Ver Meulen replaced you. You robbed me of all my fun.' [Laughter] Mr. McKay would never appear in public to defend his actions. He would rely on

a poison pen writer and the editorials in his throw-away paper,
The Michigan Times.

When questioned by reporters he always claimed he was not involved in local politics. We didn't know what it's all about. Then the next minute he could be on the phone trying to get one of our boys to switch sides.

SOAPES: What kind of support did you get from the local press?

VER MEULEN: Very good, very good, from the Grand Rapids Press.

But nothing from the Grand Rapids Herald. They never even mentioned it. Meetings would always be covered by other reporters. The only time they ever mentioned the campaign was the day after we swamped them. There was a front page box - - it said "Home Front Slaughters McKay."

SOAPES: But the other newspapers did give you good coverage?

VER MEULEN: Very good, very good. In fact in '42 after that campaign Lee Woodruff said, "If you will come back in '44 with a slate I'll run a quarter page, a list of Frank D. McKay controlled slate and Republican Home Front, side by side."

SOAPES: Did he do it?

VER MEULEN: Yes, that's one of the few things I noticed that survived in the scrap book.