Interview with Henry Harral

(11/2/79)

How did I happen to become the deputy streets commissioner and then commissioner in the Clark administration?

At the time, the Institute for Local and State Government at the University of Pennsylvania, usually called the Fels Institute, had a program of classes for in-service people in the city administration. We had top and just below the top officials coming out to the Institute every week and taking courses. And I was on the staff and conducted many of the courses. The street commissioner was Paul McMurray who had been appointed to that post by Mayor Clark as he entered the administration. And then the deputy streets commissioner in charge of sanitation died. He was an old hard-liner, and they needed some sort of refreshing and vitalization, and McMurray and Buck Sawyer thought it would be well to go outside the people in the department and bring in somebody for that...about two years that were left.

And so really, unbeknown to me, McMurray and Sawyer had been in touch with Dr. Sweeney who was the director of the Institute, and asked if I couldn't be relieved for a period of time to serve in that department...as the head of the sanitation department. And so it was worked out. I was given a leave of absence and went to serve as deputy in charge of sanitation.

Sanitation was a big responsibility at that time. It still is, of course, with the whole responsibility for the collection of garbage and trash, the incineration program, which was in the midst of being developed more fully at that time, due to the construction of the new incinerators, and of course, street cleaning. And all of these were ones that touched vitally the people in their homes and in their neighborhoods. And there had been some concern about the direction in which the sanitation department was moving.

I went in and got complete co-operation from the staff that was there. And I listened to what they had to say, and many of the things that we instituted at that time were things that had been developed at the second level, but had never been able to get through the hard-line top man. And so anything that was done, really, while I was there, was the result of ideas that had been germinating and couldn't get through until they put somebody in top that could do it.

(WMP: Who was that man?)

I was trying to think of his name...and of course it's in the records...who was the deputy...I can't think of his name.
After that, McMurray...just to finish the first question before we get into the others...McMurray had the opportunity to become director of the Fairmount Park and live in one of the houses out there. And for some reason, while I think it's much less of a challenge and much less of a job in my opinion, he decided he wanted to get out of the hassle of the streets department. And he took the job of director of the Fairmount Park Commission...to supervise the work of all the employees, and so on.

So, while that was going on, I imagine the talks went on between McMurray and Buck Sawyer and Mayor Clark. And so again, I think to get away from bringing up from the side, having somewhat of an outsider come in who had no axe to grind, and was going back to the university eventually, I was recommended to Clark by Buck Sawyer to become streets commissioner. And so, after serving about six months as deputy streets commissioner, I moved over to the streets commissioner's job.

One of the...maybe interesting things is that then Buck Sawyer and I went over to Clark's office and presented that he wanted me for this job. And Clark said, "Is this another one of your damned Republicans?" It was true that I was probably...I don't know whether the only Republican, but I had been a registered Republican all my life, but that didn't make any difference as far as the administration was concerned. They wanted somebody they felt could handle the job without any trouble, so they did pick me for that.

So that's how it came that I started both of those positions. Enough on that?

(BF: Ummmhummm.)

The second question...what were the major problems in your department that you had to deal with?

Well, as far as sanitation was concerned, the first thing was that they were starting to drop off on the hog farmers, mostly in New Jersey. It used to be that they bid for and paid money to handle the routes...collect the routes for garbage in Philadelphia...believe it or not. They used to bid for the routes. But then, I guess the price of hogs started to go down, and labor cost more. And so we were in a case of dropping requests for collecting garbage. We had to negotiate new contracts, cutting down the collections from three times a week to two times a week, and taking over routes with our own people, for those routes that we couldn't get anybody to apply for. This was one of the problems then, at that time.

I remember one incident when the president of Council, Jim Tate, got very much upset that we were cutting down from three collections of garbage to two a week. And he said, "You can't do
it". So we had a meeting in my house. He came over and I had charts and figures and cost data and everything else to present to him. He didn't listen to a word. He said, "You've got to go back to three times a week". And I said, "I thank you, Mr. Tate". And we could do nothing else but do what we did. We went to two collections a week, and I never heard another word from him. He had to make his pitch, was what I understood, and after that he accepted what had to be done. That was one problem.

The other problem was building of incinerators. We had to expand one in Harrowgate, I think it was; we were afraid of reaction. One time you could build incinerators; nobody thought they could object. But now citizens' groups were starting to object. And so in rebuilding the incinerator, despite the fact that the cost is more, we left the shell of the building absolutely intact and rebuilt the whole insides but then nobody could complain about the incinerator, which was at that time, fairly close to a residence that had really grown up around the incinerator.

(WMP: Which incinerator was that?)

I think it was Harrowgate.

(WMP: Which is where?)

I can't remember the location now. I'd have to go back and get the records. But that was one problem with incinerators.

And then, the location of an incinerator up along the Schuylkill was a matter of a great fight. They finally pushed it down closer to the river.

(WMP: There had been a dump there, hadn't there?)

Yes. But we were exploring new sites and having trouble wherever we wanted to place an incinerator. That was number two.

Number three...we were still burning on the dump in South Philadelphia. And one of the things that Mayor Clark wanted particularly was to stop burning those dumps. Now that was where we were...I mean, the whole thing is we were putting together the garbage collection, some of which now we had to incinerate instead of putting there, but you need to have new incinerators to take care of the smoke control problem. And the siting of the incinerators, which, of course, wherever you wanted to put it, somebody wanted it somewhere else.

I would say they were the three main problems in the sanitation department.

One other thing was the difficulty in making collections in Center City. And we switched from the daytime collection,
where it would interfere with traffic, to a nighttime collection in Center City, which I think still continues. And we had opposition from Center City residents on account of noise. So we tried to develop as noiseless an operation as we could. We had special trucks, and we had rubber things to dump the things into...into a rubber container, so that we wouldn't be banging noise. And the people had to be... whenever there was a metal container they had to set it down, not toss it out like they used to. But this was another one of the things. And this had been in their mind, in the staff mind, but had never been able to sell. And that was one of the things that I guess I did...allow improvements to come about, because I didn't have any hard and fixed...

(WMP: What was the role of Michaels... Ed Michaels?)

Ed Michaels? Well, first, when I had to have a new head of incineration of refuse disposal...he...another old-liner, he left and retired, and I brought John Bailey in from Edgeworth to be the head of incineration refuse disposal. He was one of my top aides.

Then when I moved to the streets commissioner post, I recommended Bailey to become deputy streets commissioner for sanitation. That opened up the refuse disposal post, and we brought in Ed Michaels from New York to head the refuse disposal. And he did design and carry out the incineration program.

(WMP: How did you find him in New York?)

Well, we were looking for somebody to take my post as...No. we were looking for somebody to take the post of Kelly, who was the incinerator man. He was an old-timer. So we held an examination; we advertised in the Engineering News Record and in the New York and Philadelphia papers and in APWA, American Public Works, that we were going to have this post open, which was a good post. And both Bailey and Michaels were among those who applied. And then when we picked Bailey, Michaels had come in second. So right shortly after that, I moved over and Bailey moved up, and we took the second man on the list. And Michaels came over and he accepted.

On the streets department, the problems were money... as what else. We didn't have too many organizational problems there, or any really big change-overs. It had been going in pretty good shape. They had a good cadre of workers there at pretty much all levels. And I really had a great deal more problems in policy decisions to make in sanitation than I did in streets. I can't recall that much change or specific problems. After all, it had been two years to take the transition. McMurray was streets commissioner and he had been out about two years when Joe Clark came in. So that
whatever adjustments had been made in that field, probably
had been made. And I don't really recall many serious prob-
lems. There were always the problems of money and the allo-
cations of the projects, but this had been pretty much worked
out.

We had problems of money, of state aid, of trying to get pro-
jects through the state, and many of the relationships were
with the state highway department in the bigger projects. It
doesn't strike me....I can't recall the particular problems
in the streets department end, which included the engineer-
ing, design, bridge problems, the repair and construction.
It had gone along pretty well.

So the problems that preceded...inherited from the Republi-
can administration...preceded the Clark administration, prob-
ably were handled in that two-year period that I was not
there, because I don't remember that I had much.

(WMP: Did you have all of the bridges?)

The bridges were under...

(WMP: Do you remember that Annenberg of the Inquirer tried
to scare everybody and make them feel that all of the bridges
were unsafe? Could you tell a story about that?)

Did that come at that time? It must have. The awareness in
the state came a little bit later than that. As a matter of
fact, I was mixed up in that when I went to the state high-
way department. But we completed the...one of the things I
know because my name's on the plate on the new bridge at City
Avenue crossing the Schuylkill River...that was completed at
that time. It probably had started a couple of years before,
at least.

There were continuing problems but no big thing that strikes
me at the time, in streets. Maybe we'd have to go back to
McMurray on the first two years of streets.

What do I remember about the sanitation strike in '53?

It was something that I would have preferred to handle myself.
But McMurray moved in swiftly; I don't know why. It bothered
me at the time. I felt it was my strike; I should handle it.
McMurray being my boss as streets commissioner...I was his de-
puty...he moved right into handling all of the details of the
strike. I was along with him, but...that was the way it was.
Again, I know I was ready to get up and drive a truck, but
they didn't let me do it!!

(BF: What happened in the strike? What was the issue?)

Well, I don't know. The issue...I think, was a wildcat strike,
and it had to do with some discipline. I cannot recall...one
of the things I do remember, which I probably shouldn't re-
member, was that one of the men that McMurray dealt with
...one of the men who was the ringleader...it was wildcatter.
and he had this man help him to bring the others into line.
And then about a month later, he fired this guy. And that's
something I couldn't have done if I'd leaned on the guy for
help. He figured he was a troublemaker and got rid of him.

So I say, this is one of those things that, while I felt it
should have been my responsibility, I was pushed off a little
bit onto the side...always part of it, but the direction came
from McMurray.

(WMP: What became of him? Is he still around?)

Yes. He went from the Fairmount Park to become an associate
in the dredging engineers...dredging operation...river dredg-
ing. I think it's the American Dredging Company. Then he re-
tired, of course, from that. And he was living, the last I
knew, out in Lower Merion in Wynnewood. He was mixed up in the...

(Mrs. Harral: You don't have to mention that.)

Oh well, why not. The Kravitz murder case. He lived next
door to Kravitz and he....

(Mrs. Harral: Across the street.)

...was the one that called the police into the situation.

I think to make a complete story on this you ought to have
some word from him. Of course, he may have been working more
directly with Buck Sawyer, but...I don't know, I think he
took pretty much the responsibility for that strike. So I'm
a little weak on that because I didn't make the decision.

What do I remember of the physical changes in the city that
were brought about by the Clark administration?

We were in the process of building things...important streets
and bridges. I think Harbison Aramingo connections were built
about that time, or had been underway when I got there. The
construction of the City Line interchange was probably then
going on. But there were a number of projects. The clean-up
of the dumps in South Philadelphia, I think was one of the
things that Joe Clark wanted to accomplish and did accomplish
in that administration. He gradually wiped out the open burn-
ing, which again, forced us into more incinerator construction.

(WMP: Well, whatever you did, it's not a problem any longer,
is it?)

Hummmmm?
Yes, by that program. Then, of course, they have strict... ...we built the incinerators to the standards required at that time. Then they increased the standards, so part of the thing then was to increase the efficiency of the smoke and pollution matters at the incinerators.

(WMP: Wasn't there a big to-do about an incinerator projected where Jack Kelly lived?)

Yes, well that was the one. We had it located near to him and we finally put it down just on the hilltop overlooking the Schuylkill...you know the one...the blue...that's the one that was moved about, I would guess, half or three-quarters of a mile further away from that area. It probably was a good thing. That was a big to-do at that time. And Abe was in the midst of that.

(WMP: He was?)

Well, they had court...I remember testifying on the location of that particular incinerator.

(WMP: Well, would you say that the conditions are better now or have they deteriorated since then?)

On the air pollution? Oh, in the general operation of the city? Well, I thought they started to deteriorate at the end of the Dilworth administration. I never had too much respect for Tate's administration. I think he tried, but he didn't have it to keep on the sort of the upward trend that both Clark and Dilworth gave to the city. I think we had a fair beginning in the Tate administration, but I sort of think things went downhill at the end of Dilworth's.

(WMP: Did Dilworth carry on as well as Clark had?)

Well, I never thought that Dilworth was the administrator that Clark was, and that things loosened up a little bit, but still, I thought he was ideal for his time. And I think that there's no need to be ashamed of what happened in the Dilworth administration. But when Tate took over, I think they started to go back to business as usual, which I think the Clark and Dilworth administrations interfered with.

(WMP: Would you comment on conditions today? Do you have anything to say about the present set-up in City Hall?)

Well, I don't know. I followed through with the public works end in Philadelphia, and I think the morale must be about... running close to the zero per cent. The streets commissioners got worse and worse. Well...who was the one that had to resign on account of health?
(Mrs. Harral: The one that needed the

Yeah!!!

There're a couple of other questions here...we'll just con-
tinue them.

(WMP: Yes, let's go back to them.)

How was the work of the department co-ordinated with the
other departments in the Clark administration?

Well, of course, when Buck was there, he really exercised a
bit of control, and so did Nor .... Vernon Northrup. Of
course, when Buck died, then Northrup took over. That was
still in....

(WMP: That was still Clark.)

That was still Clark, yes. Well, we had very good...I think
it was excellent co-ordination. We had monthly meetings, as
I recall, of just the ten commissioners with the managing
director. And there were just quarterly meetings with the
whole group, with the other members, including yourself and
finance. Any problems usually could be handled across the
line of the commissioner. And when there was any problem,
two or three of us would go and talk with Buck Sawyer. And
I think he was a great administrator and got people working
together. It was a fine group of commissioners. They were
brought over from all across the country, as a matter of fact,
and some of them are still there. I mean, recreation is still
there, Dixon in health.

There was one more. Did I render other services to the city
after the Clark administration ended?

Well, I hope so, by going back to the university, and we
were still continuing our in-service training there. But it
enabled me to, I think, be a much better professor because I
had served in the administration.

Then, of course, when I got to the state, I was chief deputy
secretary under Governor Leader, when Lew Stevens took over,
when there was a scandal in the highway department, Joe Law-
lor was the secretary appointed by Leader and they had what
they called the Cinders Scandal, which didn't touch Leader,
I mean, didn't touch Lawlor, personally, but because he had
not been a good watchdog over his own people, I think Leader
kicked him upstairs to the turnpike commission, and brought
in Lew Stevens to be secretary of highways. And then Lew
Stevens asked if I couldn't be given a leave of absence to
go up and serve as his chief deputy in Harrisburg for the
remainder of the term.
So at that time, I was then dealing on state aid to Philadelphia as well as to the other places. And again, both Lew and I being Philadelphia oriented, I guess maybe we did more by Philadelphia than we should have, but I don't think so.

And then, later, when the Republicans finally recognized my superb qualities, why, Scranton asked me to come to be secretary of highways. And I served during the four years of his term as secretary of highways. Again, I had numerous contacts with Philadelphia, and deeply involved in the...two things...the Mid-county Expressway and then the Delaware Expressway. And at that time we moved the expressway down from the...on a sort of a high situation down low. And then, much to my chagrin, they did it even more; they put it down lower to hide it completely, and delayed it for ten or fifteen years.

But from that point of view, I think that my being with the city, and then being with the state, made for a good situation...

(WMP: For Philadelphia.)

...for Philadelphia and the area.

(WMP: I never thought of Lew Stevens as much of an administrator.)

No, he wasn't a good administrator. He was a wonderful man. But one thing I was worried about...about Lew...is we'd have a staff meeting called for 4:30, and so all of the top staff with the highway department would be sitting outside his office. And he'd have an appointment at 4:00 with somebody, and they'd talk and talk and talk and talk. This to me, was bad administration.

Let me add just a little point that probably doesn't mean much. You may be interested to know that one time Buck Sawyer and Joe Clark and I went up to Harrisburg to try to get more money for Philadelphia. And on the way back on the train, I can remember just sitting there, and Joe Clark and Buck Sawyer talking...Buck was trying very much to get Clark to agree to run for a second term. He felt that the city needed his management for another four years. But at that time, Clark was looking towards the Senate, and despite everything that Buck Sawyer could throw at him, he just resisted. He wanted to get on the national scene. I sometimes think it was a shame too; I think that he could have really done more. For the second term he could have really done more than Dilworth did, because I think Clark was a more ruthless man than...

(WMP: Also, he had a better background. In the war, he was
an executive officer for the man who was in charge of the Hump...getting the supplies into China.)

(Mrs. Harral: In the First World War?)

(WMP: Second World War.)

Well, I thought that he was a tougher man than Dilworth, and for that reason I would have liked to have seen him continue, but that's one of those funny memories I have of him. I just sat there and listened.

(WMP: Joe had it in his mind when he was in school that he wanted to be a senator. I know that because I went to the school where he went...boarding school...and each boy had to carve a plaque which would be put on the wall in the school at one place or another. And he put on his plaque...the best that he could make it...a picture of the United States Capitol.)

Well, he got there. Then he forgot to do his homework!

Then, one other item. Of course, as secretary of highways, though not necessarily...but I was on the State Planning Board at Harrisburg in the Scranton administration...and of course, Clark was on the State Planning Board at the same time. So was Hopkinson. And he would regularly come up from Washington once a month to attend the State Planning Board meetings, and as I said, that was another time that I was in touch with him.

(WMP: That's interesting.)

Any other questions you'd like to ask?

(WMP: I think you've given us a lot of things that I had forgotten about...or never knew about.)

Remember the time at one of our meetings...the whole group of commissioners and directors...that they brought Hubert Humphrey in to speak to us? Hubert Humphrey at that time was mayor of Milwaukee?? And I often thought about the two of them after that, and wondered why Clark, who was as intelligent equally as Hubert Humphrey...why Hubert Humphrey was able to move much into the national picture. And I guess it is that ebullience and liveliness of Humphrey...they're both intelligent and wonderful people, but it always surprised me that Humphrey moved so much further than Clark did.

(WMP: I'll tell you an interesting little story about Humphrey. When I was chairman of ADA, he was**one of their annual banquets, and I had to introduce him. So he said to me,
as we all had sat down..."Now Walter, I have a habit of talking too long. So would you pull my coattail when I should be stopping?" And I said, "Oh, do you really mean that?". And he said, "Yeah". And I said, "Well, I'll do it." And when I thought he had gone over his time a good deal, I pulled his coattail, and nothing happened. So then I pulled again about ten minutes later, and still he didn't stop. And the third time, he did. And then he turned around when he had sat down, and he said, "Phillips, don't think I didn't hear you the first time!!")

I can remember him at meetings just bouncing all over that room. He talked to us about some of the experiences in Milwaukee. It was certainly a stimulating thing being in the city government at the time.

(WMP: I think you were there at the best time. I was there only one administration; I couldn't get along with Dick. Well the reason was because I favored Joe over Dick to be the first mayor...the first reform mayor.)