Interview with Leon J. Obermayer

5/4/78

Packard Building, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

I was born in a little town called Sciota, Illinois, on the 24th of September, 1886. My father was a member of the Second Virginia Infantry, Confederate Army, when he was captured during the Civil War, taken out west, put in a Union camp, and when the war was over, he was out in Illinois. They released him out there. He was born in Germany. He knew some people in Philadelphia and he came here and first thing you know, he met a girl who happened to be my mother. He took her out there and they were married. Moved to Philadelphia in 1892, attended all public schools in Philadelphia. I went to elementary school, I went to secondary school, I went to Central High School. Graduated from the University of Pennsylvania...I spent one year in the Wharton School and three years in the Law School.

I'm married, have three children, all of whom are married, have nine grandchildren, live happily at Nineteenth and Walnut Street with the same woman I married fifty-five years ago. And I've got a great life to look back on...be thankful for, and to be hopeful that it continues for many years.

I might add here, and this is just pure boastfulness, I guess, my one son is a graduate of Dartmouth, and owns and conducts a newspaper in Arlington, Virginia. I have another son that's a nuclear chemist, with a degree in chemistry from Swarthmore and a degree in nuclear chemistry from M.I.T., who runs a laboratory in Boston. And I have a daughter who's married to the head of the Cardiology Department in the University of Pennsylvania Hospital, and whose specialty is hypertension. If you go to the University Hospital and you have a hypertension case and they want a specialist in it, that's my son-in-law's job. So my family are all taking care of themselves; I'm sure they're all making a good living 'cause they've never asked the old man for a nickel, which is a pretty good test of whether it's succeeding or not.

(B.F.: Walter made up some questions here that occurred to him. Apparently you met recently at the Sunday Breakfast Club and were talking and I think you said that you could remember back to the Blankenburg administration.)

Very well, very well.

(B.F. Tell what you remember of Blankenburg* and what his accomplishments were.)

Well, I graduated from the Central High School in 1904, entered the University of Pennsylvania in 1905, and in 1905 there was organized in Philadelphia by my then associate and subsequently my partner, Franklin Spencer Edmonds, the City Party. The City Party was formed for the purpose of defeating the administration in Philadelphia, which had been, like all administrations, they were all called "corrupt and contented," I guess.

Mr. Edmonds was the chairman of the City Party in 1905 and I was his secretary. I didn't study much law in my early days, because I only went to Law School a couple hours a day...the rest of the time I was acting as secretary to the chairman of the City Party.

Among the well-known names in that party were Albert E. Turner, Clarence L. Harper, Rudolph Blankenburg, Edward A. Anderson, who subsequently became a judge of our Orphans' Court, Van Dusen, whose first name I forget, but who's the grandfather of Lew Van Dusen and the grandfather of Judge Van Dusen. He lived on Logan Circle next door to Rudolph Blankenburg...two doors from Rudolph Blankenburg...because next door to Rudolph Blankenburg lived James P. McNichol, who was the head of the Republican organization. In that same neighborhood was Charley Segal, Charley Hall, who was the president of City Council, and if I looked at Lucretia Blankenburg's book...Lucretia was the wife of Rudolph Blankenburg...Rudolph Blankenburg was a wool merchant...I was going to say manufacturer but you don't manufacture wool, I guess. But Blankenburg and McNichol and van Dusen were all neighbors of each other, in Logan Square.

Blankenburg was an active, militant city reformer, served in the City Party with Mr. Edmonds. Sometime if you give me an opportunity to refresh my memory from Lucretia Blankenburg's book, I can give you a good deal of detail about that.

I came to know Rudolph Blankenburg more or less intimately, as a young man going to Law School working in the office of the law firm then known as Mason and Edmonds. That was William Clark Mason and Franklin S. Edmonds. I went there between my second and third...my first and second year, and my second and third year in Law School. And when I graduated from Law School in 1908 I went with that firm, and that firm and its continuation, I'm still in it. Because it was at one time Mason, and then Mason and Edmonds, and then Edmonds and Obermayer, and then Edmonds, Obermayer and Rebmann...well then, I guess it's now Obermayer, Rebmann, Maxwell and Hippel. But it's a continuation of the same group of people who grew from a little law office with three lawyers in it; we have about fifty-five or sixty here now.
So far as politics is concerned, Rudolph Blankenburg was probably the most militant reformer in Philadelphia. He was vigorously opposed to the Republican in power and the thing all came to a head when the city wanted to lease the Gas Works to somebody. And the Gas Works scandal caused the great rumpus of 1904, 1905, and 1906.

Rudolph Blankenburg wanted to file a bill in equity and subsequently did file it, to prevent City Council and prevent the city government...and I don't recall who was mayor at that time, it might have been Ashbridge, but I think it was earlier than Ashbridge...but he wanted to file a bill in equity to restrain the sale of the Gas Works. And he asked Mr. Edmonds to prepare the bill in equity. And I being the only young man in the office...in those days we had small offices...prepared the bill in equity, met with Rudolph Blankenburg to get whatever facts he wanted to give me...I definitely remember going up to Lake Pocono where he had a summer home, to have him sign the bill in equity one summer. We wanted to file it during the summer and he didn't want to come down here, so they chased the kid up there.

And I went up there and spent a day or two with him and his wife, and I'm afraid, learned to be a militant reformer myself. I'm not ashamed of it a bit. But then was formed the City Party. The City Party organized the City Club. The City Club was at 313 South Broad Street for a long time was a club where people congregated who were interested in good government.

I was a kid member, or maybe I was just permitted there because Mr. Edmonds was active in it, or Blankenburg was active in it; I don't think I had enough money to pay their dues, but I used to go there every now and then and snatch a lunch or something like that. But the City Party elected in 1905 or '06.... I'm shocked that I can remember these names...elected Wilson H. Brown sheriff, J. M. Rush Jermon coroner; Ed Anderson and Rudolph Blankenburg county commissioners. Now those were minor jobs, but they were the effort of the reformers to break down the organization and they succeeded. Anderson later became a judge; Blankenburg later became mayor. Wilson Brown was sheriff and I don't think he ever had any other job.

The reformers....two very active men in it were Clarence L. Harper and Albert E. Turner, who constituted the banking firm of Harper and Turner and who were able to supply money to pay some of the expenses of this reform group.

The reform group stayed in power for some number of years...Lucretia Blankenburg's book can tell you exactly...and finally lost power when too many of them became greedy for power.
The reformers all wanted jobs and when they all wanted jobs they became hungry for them and became...I guess the thing happened that happens with people who seek power to have it too avidly and actively.

(WMP: What about Morris Llewellyn Cooke?)

Well, I knew Morris Llewellyn Cooke very well. He was an engineer, I think. Was he an engineer?

(WMP: Yes, he was an engineer...oh yes.)

You know, I haven't thought of these things in seventy years. You're getting me way back years ago. I'm just shocked that my memory's good enough to remember. But I remember Morris Llewellyn Cooke very well. I don't know that I can specifically pinpoint anything that he did, except to say that he, together with the men whose names I've mentioned, was very active in promoting activities against the Republican organization of Charley Seager, Charley Hall, Jim McNichol, Izzy Durham,...oh gee, I forgot him...he was a very active person in the Republican organization in those days. And of course, we reformers thought that anybody that was active gang Republican, was destined for hell and damnation some day.

But I'm sorry I can't pinpoint anything about Morris Cooke except I knew him, he was a nice-looking man with a little whitish mustache...

(WMP: Well, he was director of public works, wasn't he?)

Yes, director of public works, that's right. I remember some things as you recall them to me, but Morris Cooke I knew very well and he was a very earnest, honest, energetic reformer who wasn't interested in money at all. He was interested in making Philadelphia a better city in which to live.

(BF: What led up to Blankenburg being elected mayor then?)

Well, he was just about in the tail end of reform power. I'm sorry I don't...I wish I'd thought about it; if I'd looked at the Lucretia Blankenburg book, and I have a couple other books on it...I think, but I don't know offhand. But I think he was elected mayor because the reformers were still in power. They hadn't fallen apart by reason of their demand for jobs. There were too many fellows who wanted jobs and too many fellows seeking jobs for fellows that wanted jobs who weren't deserving of jobs. And that always causes the breakdown of the organization. It's ...maybe history's repeating itself, but we'd better not go into that now, either.
(BF: Do you remember any of the issues that were ... well, you mentioned the Gas Works.)

Well the Gas Works issue was the issue. D. Clarence Gibboney was a very active man in those days. He was interested in reforming politics through law. He went to pieces a good deal, because he got a gix about taking care of women. He thought he could prevent prostitution. Well I guess it's been so since Adam and Eve's day...I don't know, but maybe I don't have to go back that far. He used to, every Saturday night, D. Clarence Gibboney...he used to organize a police group which would raid half a dozen houses of prostitution, take all the women without very much clothes on up to city Hall, and they'd have a hearing in the courtroom. The courtroom was usually crowded with guys like me who stood around and wanted to see what they looked like. But he was a devoted citizen. He thought he was making these women better people.

I was asked by John Hampton Barnes, a well-known lawyer of Philadelphia, who was then counsellor for the Pennsylvania Railroad, and his niece, Constance Biddle, who's a sister of the man who's attorney general...Francis Biddle...to organize a group called The Girls' Aid. And we had a woman named Gillette the head of it. And it was our job after a while to go into City Hall and get these poor women, many of whom weren't really prostitutes. They were widows, they were girls alone, they needed the money...this was a way to get it, it was an easy way to get it...and the Girls' Aid was formed for the purpose of helping out these girls that were arrested in the Gibboney raids. And they asked me, a young lawyer, if I would represent them for nothing. Well I was glad to do it; I didn't have anything else to do...it kept me busy and kept me in touch with fellows like Barnes and the Biddles, and of Francis Biddle through that very well.

Gibboney finally fell apart because most people began to feel that he was getting to be a showman. He was a great protector and organizer of women's rights, and a great many of the women, and I say this based upon a good deal of knowledge when I was acting as counsel for the Girls' Aide, were women who just needed the money. They weren't prostitutes at all. As soon as they could get the money, they left to go, but it was an easy way of making money.

Prostitution then...well, I don't know that I know this...but prostitution was largely confined to women in whore houses, they called them. There wasn't near so much street walking and that sort of thing. There wasn't near so much of what came to be known as an organization run by pimps, with men getting these women and selling their bodies for what they could get out of it. If you ask me when it changed, you ask how I know, the first thing you know, I'll be in trouble.
Do you have some other names there that you could remind me of?

(WMP: Some of the people who really held the city government together for long period of time prior to the Clark-Dilworth period, like John Neeson and Thomas Buckley in City Hall. Did you know them?)

Of course, I knew them; I was executor of Bob Lamberton's estate. Bob Lamberton died in 1941, you know, died August the 22nd... how I remember that, I don't know. He died the 22nd of August, 1941. He was succeeded by Barney Samuel. He was preceded by John S. Clark Jr.

(WMP: Didn't Lamberton die up in New England?)

No, Lamberton was only mayor for a year or so. He was a judge of the Common Pleas Court. He was a great friend of the Pews of the Sun Oil Company. They sponsored him. I knew him well; I played golf with him regularly and I say I was executor of his estate, I was executor of his widow's estate. I represent his three children now, the Lamberton children.

But Lamberton... who the devil preceded him? Barney Samuel succeeded him.

(BF: Let's see, I've got ... was it S. Davis Wilson?)

S. Davis Wilson is right. S. Davis Wilson was city controller for a while and he subsequently became mayor. You know, I'm shocked at how much of this I remember 'cause I haven't thought of this for years.

S. Davis Wilson I knew and S. Davis Wilson was not a very conscientious high-grade person. He was interested in S. Davis Wilson a good deal more than he was interested in the city of Philadelphia. Now if you ask me to prove all those things, I'm going to be in trouble. And really, I'm speaking to you from reputation a good deal, and lived through it, and having been interested in city government because I was sort of brought up in it with Mr. Edmonds.

I think I ought to add that when I was in Central High School, one of my teachers was Franklin Spenser Edmonds. He taught me in a class called 'Politics,' which was 19th century history going from Napoleon up to the present day. And when I graduated from Central High School in 1904, that same year Mr. Edmonds gave up teaching at the Central High School, and started to practice law with Mr. Mason, because he studied at night. And then when I went to Law School, I knew Mr. Edmonds pretty well from teaching. We'd had some very personal experiences which made him very much more a father to me than the
father I ever had. My father had died when I was very young.

(WMP: Leon, were you active in the Philadelphia Committee for Public Affairs? It came out, I think, of the period of time that you mostly talked about.)

Yes, the name rings a bell, but...

(WMP: It came out of the City Club.)

Yes, I think that's true. And I became active in the City Club in later years...in its later years. 'Course the City Club's been out of business for twenty years, has it...?

(WMP: Oh, at least that.)

At least that. Just sorry I didn't re-check my memory for these things...I'll give you some of it, but I'll check it and give you the rest of it some other time.

(WMP: If you'd like to fill in, that'd be great.)

Of course, I've been interested in city government...chiefly, I have three children, all of whom went to public schools. I went to public school. I think the future of America lies in what the public school does in its bringing up of children.

(WMP: And you were chairman of the Board of Education, weren't you?)

I served on the Board of Public Education in Philadelphia for twenty-three years. I served as its vice-president for six years; I served as its president for six years.

(BF: What period was that?)

I succeeded Dr. Edward Martin on the Board of Public Education in 1938, and served on the Board until 1961. I was vice-president from 1949 to 1955, during which time the Board of Education got a good deal more of publicity than it gets now, except you forget it, because we fired thirty-two schoolteachers as Communists. Remember when the newspapers were filled with all that story? And Walter Saul was president and Walter Saul didn't believe we ought to prosecute them, and I thought we did. Chances are I was wrong, incidentally, but that's water over the dam too.

But during my term as vice-president, I conducted the hearings, and all of them were public hearings. They were held before the whole Board, with the teachers being represented by counsel, with the Board of Education being represented by counsel,
and the way we got these teachers was that the F.B.I., of course, it was in the McCarthy days, too, supplied the Board of Education with information about the teachers, with the agreement that we must never disclose the source of our information. But we knew that "Teacher A" belonged to Cell Number 1422 with the Communist Party because it was supplied to us. We knew that "Teacher Number Two" had paraded on a parade in front of City Hall, in front of the Board of Education, complaining that schools weren't being run right. But we had some wild times. The case finally went to the United States Supreme Court, you know. And the only way we won was...and this was the very smart decision of some lawyers we had in those days...we didn't fire them as communists. We fired them for insubordination, which was provided for in the School Act. And the insubordination was the fact that the superintendent of schools would call the teacher before him and say, ...you, Mary Jones, belong to Cell number 1422... and she would say...I refuse to answer...because her lawyer told her to say that. And you, Number Somebody-or-Other, paraded in front of City Hall at such and such a time, and you were with Cell Number So-and-So. She said...I refuse to answer. Then we fired them on the ground that they'd been insubordinate to the superintendent of schools who had a right to know everything about his teachers. And if a teacher refused to answer, he had a right to fire her. It went up to the United States Supreme Court and we won.

(WMP: Was there not a man named Beany Baldwin who was the head of the teachers' group at that time?)

What's his name?

(WMP: Beany Baldwin.)

B-A-L-D-W-I-N?

(WMP: Yeah.)

That doesn't register with me. Beany Baldwin. That doesn't register with me at this minute; it may come to me. Bruce Baldwin, of course, I know very well and so do you.

(WMP: Yes.)

Poor guy. He's complete...do you ever see him anymore?

(WMP: I haven't, no.)

He's completely out of everything. He served on the Board
of Education when I was on it. You know, he was charged with assaulting some girls in his office and I think he was acquitted, as a matter of fact, but it just knocked him completely out of everything. And he hasn't done a thing since then. A fine gentleman...least of all I knew about him was that...things that were charged against him I knew nothing about.

(BF: Well, in all that long time on the Board of Education, what were some of the...how did the issues that were in front of the Board change during that time?)

Well, we had some very competent superintendents of schools. I tried to remember then, as I try to remember now, that my training is that of a lawyer, not of a teacher. And the teachers, particularly the trained experienced pedagogues know more about teaching than I do. But in those days, we had Alexander J. Stoddard as superintendent of schools; we had Edward Brooks, superintendent of schools; we had Alan H. Wetter, superintendent of schools...

(WMP: Add Anderson running the business end of it?)

If the Board of Education had Add Anderson the last twenty years, they would have been in much less trouble than they are today. I'd like to say, and I'm glad you reminded me of it, to say a word for Add Anderson. All the time I was connected with the Board of Education, from the time I went on its Board to the time I retired, Add Anderson was the secretary and business manager. He was a man without a college education, but a perfectly honest, straightforward guy who kept me out of more mischief than you can count. He was insistent every year when we came around to about the middle of November, that either we had a balanced budget for the first of January, or we wouldn't have a budget. And very often, we held up our budget for a month or two, because he insisted we drop this or drop that, but we had to have a balanced budget. We never had a deficit budget. Having a deficit budget's the style these days, I guess, but under Add Anderson we never had it. Add Anderson would do this, and this would happen very often.

You know, most teachers are devoted, dedicated people. One of my happy experience...one of the happy experiences of my life are the very dedicated, devoted fine people I met in the school system...some of the teachers are great people. And they very often had new ideas about teaching.

A teacher would come in to me or come in to Add Anderson or come in to Dr. Stoddard, or Alan Wetter...or I forgot Dr. Broome was superintendent of schools during that time...Edwin W. Adams was associate superintendent. A teacher would come in
with a very good idea about education... Masterman School and schools of that kind. And Add Anderson would say to me... well, let's fix a date two weeks hence and hear the story. And so the superintendent of schools and Add Anderson and myself, maybe an associate superintendent, would meet the people interested in this new idea in education. We'd listen to them for an hour or so, and then Add Anderson would very smartly say, ...how much is it going to cost? Well, most of them hemmed and hesitated a little bit. They knew blamed well that if you had a new department you had to have a head of the department, a couple of assistants, a couple of stenographers... a department didn't mean one head; it meant more than that.

So Add Anderson, after we'd annoyed him a little bit about how much it would cost, he'd say... well now, suppose we fix it at two hundred thousand dollars. Where are we going to get the money? Well, that they couldn't say anything about at all; they were stumped entirely. So he said... well, now let's fix another meeting a month hence, and by that time you come back and tell us how much it's going to cost and where we're going to get the money. We usually didn't have another meeting. And Add Anderson, and I'd like to say, having been on that board twenty-three years, and I'm happy to pay a tribute to him, was a devoted, dedicated business manager who was brought up on the same theory that I was. If I ever had a dollar, I never spent more than ninety cents of it. And Add Anderson felt that way about public schools. Now he was hated by an awful lot of people, just because he was tough on questions of money. But we never had a deficit in my day. And we never had it chiefly because Anderson just wouldn't let it be... that's all.

His son, you know, is still around... his son, Add Anderson Jr. is a member of the Union League.

(WMP: I didn't know his son.)

His son makes, oh sells paper forms of some kind. I know him; I don't know him intimately.

(BF: Walter has a question here about the Sesquicentennial during Mayor Kendrick's administration. Do you remember anything about that?)

Oh, I remember, it was 1926. And Kendrick was the mayor. A fellow named William Abrahms was chairman of it. Bill Sawyer was the executive director. I took my father-in-law to the first prize fight he ever saw down in the Kennedy Stadium. It rained cats and dogs all through the prize fight and both of us came home soaking wet. I thought I was making a big show-off to my father-in-law, but he had enough prize fights with that one.
Well the Sesquicentennial under the direction of Sawyer... Sawyer was the executive director of the whole business... ...was a great deal of a flop. It was run a good deal by the people who were active in the Elks, who run that building at Broad and Wood...the Elks something-or-other.

Kendrick was there, Bill Abrahams was there...I'll think of some more names maybe. But it had poor planning, poor direction, inferior execution, and spent a good deal of money talking about the Sesquicentennial, but that's about all. I remember it very well.

(WMP: Leon, would you want to say what you remember about some of those mayors, like Hampton Moore, Mackey, Kendrick...)

Of course, I knew Hampton Moore very well, too. We forgot him for mayor.

(WMP: Twice he was mayor.)

Of course, I knew Moore when he was a congressman. He was a congressman for a good many years. I'm really shocked at how well I remember these things, 'cause I haven't thought of these things for a long time. He was Mayor in 1920 and I think again in 1932.

(WMP: That's really great that you can. I think it's marvelous.)

Life's been very good to me. I can tell you that.

Now Hampy Moore I knew pretty well. He was especially interested in waterways. He was interested in developing inland waterways, clearing out the Delaware River Channel, and that sort of thing. I think he was twice mayor, wasn't he?

(WMP: Yes he was. At the very beginning of the 1920's and then at the beginning of the depression, in the 1930's...I think he was the first mayor in the depression period.)

I rather think that's right. He was before Lamberton, I know, because I remember ... Lamberton came over to see Mr. Edmonds and me when he was mayor. Lamberton, you know, was the first person to have the courage to put in a city wage tax.

(WMP: That's right.)

And Lamberton came over... that was in 1938 or '39, or something like that.

(WMP: He hocked the Gas Works, didn't he?)

Yes, you bet he did. Lamberton came over to see Mr. Edmonds
Mr. Edmonds was then a member of, I think, the Pennsylvania House, although he might have been in the Senate, because he was both in the Senate and in the House. And he was chairman of the committee on taxation and was also president of the National Tax Association, and was considered a top-ranking expert on taxes...an expert on the philosophy of taxes, rather than the effect of taxes, and those are two different things.

(WMP: Wasn't he somehow quite close to the Sun Oil people?)

Yes. That's right.

(WMP: The Pews.)

Well, Lamberton wanted to know whether he could put in a wage tax, whether it was constitutional, who would defend it, and I think Mr. Edmonds argued the case in the Pennsylvania Supreme Court defending it.

Lamberton, of course, was always subject to Sun Oil influence. I say, I was executor of his estate, but that was because he and I played golf together, and had many other social interests, and his wife thought I was honest. She said she didn't know many honest lawyers.

(WMP: I thought Bob Lamberton was a great guy.)

And, you know he just had a ...it's too bad this happened... one of his grandsons committed suicide up in college about two months ago. Bill Lamberton's son, which was Bob Lamberton's grandson, took a dose of sleeping pills about two months ago up in college. See, Mrs. Lamberton created an educational trust, which I drew up for her, under the terms of which she set aside, I think about sixty or seventy thousand dollars, the income to be used at the rate of a thousand dollars a year, which in those days was a good deal of money toward an education, for the collegiate education of her grandchildren. Every grandchild who wanted to go to college got a thousand dollars a year from this trust.

(WMP: That's an interesting idea.)

Well, I'll tell you how it worked out after a while. They got out of college and didn't get any more money and the fund suddenly grew up and grew up and within the last three or four years, we've given the children ... I think fifteen or twenty thousand out of principal. There'd be no use for it, because there'd be no more children who'd be using it.
There were three Lamberton ... there were twins, you know, one of them was blown up in World War II. He was in a tank that was just blown up and nobody knew whatever happened to that. He lived on Knox Street in Germantown...Knox and Penn Street. And he ... but Lamberton's economics, I guess that's the right word...were influenced a great deal by the Sun Oil Company. He knew the Pews very well. He knew ...well he knows over there now...what's the judge of the Orphans' Court... ...it doesn't make much difference... But Lamberton was an honest, sound person, but when the Sun Oil Company wanted him to do something, they usually had a good reason for doing it. Sun Oil people are pretty high-grade people too. You know Bob Dunlop, the president of Sun Oil Company...a very high-grade man.

(WMP: I've had dealings with him.)

I know him quite well, and don't agree with him about a great many things, but I'm always sure that he's perfectly honest. Are you a Mason?

(WMP: No, no, I'm not.)

He and I became a Mason At-Sight, one time, twenty-five years ago. They wanted to honor both of us. And on one day, they put you through all the degrees you have to go through and make you a Mason in one day, and they made he and I Mason in one day. We were worn out, and neither of us has taken any active part in Masonry since then.

Hampy Moore I knew pretty well, too.

(BF: Yes, get back to him a bit.)

Well, he was a consummate politician. He knew politics, he knew how to play politics, he knew how to get what he wanted, he ...

(WMP: He was conservative, he was careful to have a balanced budget, wasn't he.)

Oh yes. Hampy Moore was an honest, careful, methodical person, who ...it's a little hard to designate him altogether, because he wanted a balanced budget, he was interested in making Philadelphia a great city, he was interested in making Pennsylvania a great community. But he was always playing a little politics to keep himself in the position of doing that. Well, maybe that's smarter than the rest of us are, I don't know.
(WMP: He got caught in the depression. In the worst part of the depression, he was mayor of Philadelphia, remember that?)

Yup. He's ... My recollections of him, and I can think of many experiences I had with him, I guess, if I tried to...always reflect satisfaction. I mean I wouldn't count him as I would count a lot of other politicians that both you and I know. He was an honest, community-minded person. That's all you can ask of a politician. He doesn't have to agree with you. As you grow older, you find you're wrong most of the time.

(WMP: I'm getting that old.)

(BF: I'm not there yet.)

Well, you can look forward to it.

(WMP: Well, I don't want to tire you, Leon, is there anything else we want to put on record?)

Well, now that I know what you want...you told me, but I didn't pay too much attention to it...let me look in my library and refresh my memory about some of these things. Some of the personalities you'd like to have, I guess, wouldn't you.

(WMP: That's right.)

And I knew the personalities pretty well...I'm just trying to think of them, because I talked them over a great deal with Mr. Edmonds. You see, Mr. Edmonds, I told you, was my teacher in Central High School, and he and I were associated together from that time until he died in October, 1945.

(WMP: How did he happen to switch into law?)

Well, he wanted to do it. He was a....his course at the Central High School which I took in my ...a couple of years, but particularly in my senior year, was called politics. And that was the history of the governments of the world from 1790, the days of Napoleon, and all the group that were in the French Revolution, down to the present time. And he became interested in the fact that the man who controlled the government, in the long run, controlled the destiny of the people. I've got a lot of his lectures...you can read them, if you want to. I've got them home somewhere.

And then in 1904 or '5, he was just getting out to practice law. And here was a great opportunity for advertising for a new lawyer. And he became chairman of the City Party. I attended their conventions ...the first convention of the City Party was held at the Academy of Music. The second convention of the City Party
where I sat up on the platform throughout the convention, was at the old Musical Fund Hall, on Eighth and Locust Street or some place like that. I'll never forget, he broke his gavel in half, trying to keep order.

But Edmonds, Edmonds was a gentleman of the highest order. He was president of the Brotherhood of Saint Andrew, he was active in the Episcopal church, he was a vestryman of Saint Francis of ....Saint Matthew's of Francisville Church at Eighteenth and Girard Avenue. He wrote a book, you know, the history of Saint Francis of Assisi.

But Edmonds was a religious person and you might have known his brother, Sam, who was secretary of Philadelphia Company for Guaranteeing Mortgages at one time. And then he had a brother George, who was in the coal business, George W. Edmonds, who was a congressman at one time. But he was interested in politics because he thought he ought to be. His wife was Elise Beitler. She was the daughter of Judge Abraham M. Beitler, who was the judge of one of our Common Pleas Courts here at one time.

(WMP: Is that the Beitler of Drinker, Biddle and Reath?)

Yes. The firm used to be Dixon, Beitler and McCouch. They used to be down in the Bourse Building. Dixon, Beitler and McCouch. Well, that was Abraham M. Beitler, and he was the father of Elise Beitler, who was married on the sixth of December, 1909, to Frank Edmonds. I was there. Now, how I remember the date, I don't know, but I remember it, that's all. I can't tell you what I had for breakfast today.

(WMP: You're a computer.)

I don't know. Well, now, now let me refresh my memory a little bit...

(WMP: We'll have another session.)

I won't mind another session. I expect to be in town now...