

Transcript of Oral History Tape # T-6-136

Politics and a Newsmen

Transcribed by Mary Ann Vartia 09/10/03.

Mr. Spiers: Since 1928.

Interviewer: Since 1928. And in 1929, I imagine things have changed quite a bit.

Mr. Spiers: You could say that, yes.

Interviewer: Okay. Now Mr. Spiers is an ardent follower of politics, and today we would like to get some of his reminiscences of what went on in LaPorte County politics over the years. Mr. Spiers, when did you actually first follow politics?

Mr. Spiers: Well, I began as a newspaperman. I in 1933 joined the Michigan City Dispatch as a green, wet nosed cub reporter and became Sports Editor later that year and served in '33 and '34. About 1935 I was beginning to cover general news and a part of this was politics. In those days newspapers and politics were very much related, and from this point on—politics has always had a fascination for me, beginning with covering the hijinks that were going on in those days. It was a good deal more colorful, a good deal more rough and tough, and just a lot more fascinating than it is today.

Interviewer: Would you say that there was more personal contact in politics in those days?

Mr. Spiers: Oh, sure. And there was a lot more personality in politics. These were the days when most of the papers indulged in a great deal of personal venom, personal maligning and demeaning, and hatchet jobs on people—political people.

Interviewer: In other words, the papers more or less told the story as it was.

Mr. Spiers: Yeah, they had in Michigan City and prior to this time was historic—the battles for the morality between Fred Miller and Martin T. Krueger were legion, legend. Martin Krueger had a very famous story that was told—that he often told—and at one point in one campaign, Mr. Miller evidently laid it on him pretty good in a personal way. And somebody says, "Aren't you going to answer him, Martin?" He says, "Why should I answer the fella, no man every out pissed a skunk."

Interviewer: As I understand it—well, through reading through my research, I found that Martin Krueger was one hell of a politician.

Mr. Spiers: Oh, indeed, he was.

Interviewer: He was very outspoken, and we don't have to go into his political career, although it was very colorful.

Mr. Spiers: Very farsighted, too. It was because of him we have Washington Park today, and a number of other good things.

Interviewer: That's right. Otherwise, we might have U.S. Steel on the lakefront.

Mr. Spiers: But he predated my career and my personal knowledge of things.

Interviewer: Well, okay. When you first got involved in politics, what was the situation on the national level, statewide level, and the common level?

Mr. Spiers: Well, in 1932, as you recall, the Democrats had swept practically everything—that's local, state, national, everything; and they were totally dominant in Michigan City, in LaPorte County, in the State of Indiana. Paul McNutt had been elected governor. The paper that I had worked for had been purchased in 1932 by the Democratic State Central Committee either directly or subtly—I never did find out which—in order to keep it alive for one more campaign so that the Democrats would have one organ in LaPorte County. The Michigan City News was rock rib Republican and The Herald Argus in LaPorte was rock rib Republican, and The Dispatch was Democratic. The Democrats sent Ples(sp?) Greenley up here to be a publisher. You may remember he later became Governor McNutt's patronage secretary. Mr. Nixon, Don Nixon, Sr., the gentleman who broke me into the newspaper business, purchased the paper from the Democratic State Central Committee, I have been told for somewhere around \$30,000, which was lock, stock, and barrel, quite a reasonable price, except for one thing. The Dispatch at that time, the time he purchased it, was almost totally moribund. It was dead; it simply hadn't been buried. The circulation was about 1,600, most of whom paid, but not all; and The News had 6,000. There was just—it was just at the end of its rope; but Mr. Nixon fooled 'em. He poured some life in the old girl, and he bought it in 1932, and in 1938 we bought The News and consolidated the two papers.

Interviewer: Well, in those days—now the really strong dominant days of the Ku Klux Klan in Indiana had passed. Did the Klan still have any power?

Mr. Spiers: None. If any, very, very little in Michigan City. It was never visible.

Interviewer: That's what I had been told before, it had been quite kind of secret, underhanded..

Mr. Spiers: Well, D.C. Stevenson was already in prison, and the Klan had pretty much broken up, disintegrated. That was in the '20s.

Interviewer: Now, this is just bringing us out of the era of Prohibition. What type of an environment did that create locally?

Mr. Spiers: Well, during Prohibition, we had the usual amount of bootlegging, nothing sensational; but there was plenty of bootlegging, and there was plenty of corruption in connection with it. We had a few scandals here that predated my time. I was in high school at the time and didn't realize what was going on; but after Prohibition what got started in Michigan City was gambling—wide open gambling, wide open vice, and the marriage between the organized rackets and the politicians. And this, during the period of the

'30s, Michigan City was known as Little Las Vegas, or what we call it today, we call it Little Las Vegas, because we had slot machines everywhere, except the church vestibules. We had three brothels on the main street—no, we had two brothels on the main street and three of them in what was called The Patch, which was the Negro district at that time, another one over on the lakefront, and gambling joints, a wide open joint in the basement of the Spaulding Hotel, which was the leading hostelry of the town at the time. Another one at a nightclub on the North end called The Embassy. Another one out on the South side at a—one of the taverns out there, and a few others scattered here and there.

Interviewer: In other words, things here jumped.

Mr. Spiers: Yeah, you could call it a swinging town. We called it a rotten town because the corruption that was visited upon the public officials. Gambling per se I don't think is very sinful, when gambling—because everybody gambles. I do, I love it. But when gambling gets organized to the point where it begins to pay off public officials, then you have a great evil. And this is the thing that newspapers always campaign about. And, of course, this was one of the things—we had a crusading newspaper, and I became the editor in 1936 of the old Dispatch. And when we consolidated two years later, I was the editor of The News Dispatch, the consolidated paper, and we crusaded right up until the war. We almost had the gambling situation whipped in five years, but ah...

Interviewer: Now, actually, was one party dominant over the other during that time?

Mr. Spiers: The Democrats owned the town, lock, stock, and barrel. There was no Republicans.

Interviewer: Now, in other words, you had to line up the electorate and turn 'em around.

Mr. Spiers: No, not necessarily. All you had to find was one gutty, honest law enforcement officer. We only needed one, you see. That's the great problem of the racketeer, the organized criminal, is he has to own 'em all. One honest cop can put 'em out of business. We finally elected one, or helped get one elected in 1946, after the war, and this was the beginning of the end of organized rackets in this town.

Interviewer: You elected to what post?

Mr. Spiers: Sheriff. Norman Reed, who was a young ex-marine that had been taken prisoner on Wake Island and interred in a Japanese prison camp for the whole war, he came home from there, had all this glamour right after the war, Japanese prisoner of war, the Marines of Wake Island; and it just so happened that three tough old pros were trying to get the sheriff's nomination in the primary in the Republican side and this young man went in. We suggested he go out in the country and just go from farm to farm and talk to the farmers on the theory that just possibly these three old pros, who had wanted that office for other reasons, would cut each other up to the point where the fourth man might get the nomination. That's exactly what happened. Well, then we kind of protected—had to protect Norm. He was pretty naïve; he didn't realize what was going on. He just thought everything was, you know, peaches

and cream, and simple. But he soon found out the racketeers tried to get to him, so we sent him—he married his childhood sweetheart and disappeared. Only we knew that he was down in Texas spending the summer workin' on the simple theory that we kept him away from here as long as possible. He didn't come back to start campaigning till October 1<sup>st</sup> for the reason we knew what would happen. If they couldn't get to him, they would start to smear him. That's exactly what happened. But we waited in the newspaper until the last day—the last couple days before election, and then carried the front page column to the effect that what a terrible thing it was that these racketeers had been smearing this fine young sheriff. Well, that created a great deal of sympathy for him, and he won by a fairly good margin. But most of the Republicans won that year. That was when the beginning of the Republican resurgence was occurring.

Interviewer: A realigning of the electorate.

Mr. Spiers: Yeah, people were just a little sick of this.

Interviewer: And they were tired of the status quo, and they wanted some change.

Mr. Spiers: And tired of the racketeers, and tired of the corruption.

Interviewer: Now, was it county wide? Or was it centrally located in Michigan City?

Mr. Spiers: Most of it was located in Michigan City. There was some in LaPorte and some in the county, but very, very little. Very little on an organized basis.

Interviewer: What do you think about LaPorte County as being comprised of two different sets of people? In other words, there are the people who live in northern LaPorte County and the people that live in southern LaPorte County, and what effect do you think that has on the politics of the county?

Mr. Spiers: Oh, it might have been true in those years in the '40s, the '30s or '40s, maybe even in the '50s. I think it is a very sharply diminishing factor today. Kids coming out of school are too intelligent to get splintered off and at each other's throats for provincial reasons like that, because they can recognize that it is to the detriment of their own community. It's silly. Now, for many, many years there was great rivalry between LaPorte and Michigan City, and it extended into politics. Hell, Michigan City never had a county chairman for years and years and years and years and years. LaPorte people, they owned it, they controlled it, had the county seat, and they had enough precinct votes to swing it; and they kept the county chairmanship of both parties for years.

Interviewer: Well, I really think that the animosity, part of the animosity between Michigan City and LaPorte is tied up in politics...

Mr. Spiers: Sure...

Interviewer: ...the fact that LaPorte is the county seat, whereas Michigan City is the principal city of the county. And it has gotten wrapped up in many

other things that—it is just traditional—and any two towns that close together...

Mr. Spiers: Well, it starts in high school, in high school sports.

Interviewer: Right, but I think it is kind of hereditary. Well, now, okay, we're talking about the late '30s. A man by the name of Pentergill...

Mr. Spiers: Sam Pentergill was our congressman.

Interviewer:...was in Congress from this district...

Mr. Spiers: ...for many years.

Interviewer: And, let's see, he was supposedly a great statesman, and had gone through three terms in Congress. Yes, three terms in Congress.

Mr. Spiers: Three or more, it may have been more.

Speaker 2: Four.

Interviewer: Three or four, and Mr. Pentergill had an effect on the way things ran in his home county. Now what kind of an effect did Mr. Pentergill have on the county?

Mr. Spiers: He came—he left just about the time I got very much interested in politics. I don't know too much about Sam. He was a congressman at the time that I began getting involved in politics, but I had very little contact with him, and he left just about then. When did he leave office, in the late '30s?

Interviewer: He was elected again in '38.

Mr. Spiers: Yeah, okay.

Interviewer: It was his eighth year in Congress. Now, at that time radio came into play as a mass media, and it played a big roll in elections and campaigns...

Mr. Spiers: Nationally.

Interviewer: Not on the local level?

Mr. Spiers: No.

Interviewer: Not at all.

Mr. Spiers: Well, Hayward dominated the listening audience dominated by Chicago stations. No local politician could afford to advertise on the Chicago station; and there was no local station for a long time. And when one finally was established, there was very little listening again because we have, just like television today, there's no local television station for the same reason.

Interviewer: Well, then, in other words, you feel that...

Mr. Spiers: It wasn't a large factor. The print media were very, very strong in those days, insofar as politics is concerned.

Interviewer: You mean the source of information.

Mr. Spiers: Uh-hmm.

Interviewer: So, okay, so there was a resurgence of Democrat or Republican politics in the county and what type of administration took off from there? I mean, in other words, it was clean up and straighten things out, more or less turn things about for the people of the county because the people were tired of it.

Mr. Spiers: The biggest effect was in Michigan City when the sheriff, Sheriff Reed, who was elected in '46, began to clean house in '47 as soon as he took office—in Michigan City. The racketeers at the time were not impressed by him very much. They thought he was just a dumb, naïve kid who didn't know very much about law enforcement or, inversely, nothing about the intricacies of presenting a case in court. What they didn't know is that quietly, Norman had been persuaded to make a formal request of the Indiana State Police for assistance. This was the only time that state police would come into a community when they were specifically asked by a prosecutor or sheriff. That had been done quietly. He had been assigned a detective named Paul Wilhelm full time. Paul Wilhelm was one of the finest state police detectives that we ever had in this area. Thoroughly, indestructibly honest and a very thorough, detailed, patient, skilled assembler of cases. He knew criminal law backwards and forwards. In fact he later on developed some criminological book, which are aides today in law enforcement people. At that same time, Norman Reed was put in touch with an old service man back from service, who had been a former truck detective, a civilian, a private detective in the trucking industry, named John Burke who later became (indecipherable) Burke. He had two very good strong arms; and the first case—well, he, the process was very simple—right after January 1<sup>st</sup> after he took office, Reed says, "Close everything up." He gave orders to close all the gambling down in Michigan City, and nobody did. And the scuttlebutt was that we'll make an ass of him the first time he goes to court. So, with the assistance of Wilhelm and Burke, they hit a West side joint with some slot machines and some gambling, and they got ready to go to court and the lawyers for the racketeers damn near fainted because they had an absolutely perfect solid, air-tight case, which is exactly what would be under Wilhelm all the time. So, poof, they went in and plead guilty real quick. And they hit a couple more, and the same things happened. Well, they began to shape up, and they started to close some of these places. Well, the real clincher came when they, when they started—after they became aware of the fact that the sheriff was making good cases, they removed all the slot machines. Then they got word quietly that they had stored a bunch of them in a cottage in Long Beach—in Sheridan Beach. So Wilhelm very smooth—he got Burke and Reed in the sheriff's deputy's office here and they said—found out that the cottage had been rented from some woman in Chicago. So Wilhelm said, "Well, I'm going to call her and ask for permission to go in there. We don't need a search warrant if she gives us permission." Slot machines are prima facie in Indiana—prima facie possession or prima facie in contraband either one. So he calls this woman and she hemmed and hawed and said that she'd let him know and so he hung up; and Reed, who was a little naïve, said, "Well, now isn't she going to call us

Lenny (the guy who's tending the machines) and tell him right away that..." Wilhelm says, "Sure." He says, "Now we're going to wait about a half an hour and then we're going to go out there, we'll sit in sand hills behind that cottage, and we'll wait." Now the Lenny they were talking about was Lenny Fedder, the son of the mayor, who was the number one slot machine repairman for one particular group of these people, you see. So they went out there, Wilhelm, Burke, and Reed, Sheriff Reed, and they hid in the sand hills behind this cottage, and they waited. And sure enough here come the mayor's son, Lenny. He had a couple of other big huskies, and they opened the back door and they come—each one came out of the house carrying a slot machine. And Reed once said, "Oh, boy, now we got 'em. Mere possession is just total prima facie evidence." Wilhelm said, "wait a minute, don't be in a hurry. We know there's four machines in there, and don't you think it's about time he did an honest day's work?" So they sat there for 30 minutes until they got down to about the 35<sup>th</sup> or 36<sup>th</sup> machine, these three guys. What they were doing was carrying them across the lake hills and dumping 'em in a gully behind the house so they would be out of possession of 'em, see. So about the 35<sup>th</sup> machine, the boys just stood up and walked forward and (indecipherable) three of 'em with their arms full of slot machines. The judge—then we had a Republican judge—I had forgotten that Judge Al Blyden was judge at the time. (indecipherable) the time the case came before him, he not only lectured, mercilessly lectured the mayor's son for such terrible conduct involving himself in slot machine silver—he laid a \$500 fine on him and put him under six months probation, during which time he was required to report to the young sheriff weekly. And believe me that very nearly broke the back of things right there. Everything closed down. They realized that there was more to this sheriff than met the eye, and they really realized then that Wilhelm was very much involved in it. And they knew Wilhelm. They knew him to be both incorruptible and very thorough and very complete. And Burke, too, was by that time getting the same kind of reputation. So that cleaned up an awful lot of vice and gambling in Michigan City. Now later on the real—well, that isn't politics, that's racketeering.

Interviewer: Now, at that time, around that time, we're in the mid '40s, right?

Mr. Spiers: Sheriff Reed was elected in '46, immediately after the war, took office in '47. In those days it was a two-year term. He was re-elected to a second term, then the state constitution was amended to provide for a four-year term, so he was elected to a four-year term, I would think in 1950.

Interviewer: What were the major issues in the county? What were people concerned with at that time?

Mr. Spiers: Corruption.

Interviewer: But other than that? I meant, you know, other than corruption—talking about corruption?

Mr. Spiers: Insofar as county offices are concerned, very little, very, very little. I don't remember any stinging issues in those days. We have always had—well, at least since the late '40s and '50s in through there—some very, very fine public service from the standpoint of housekeeping and tending the office. Men like Herb Link who served as county auditor, and men like John Stellema, men like Dick Anderson, men like Sam Lower was in there for a

while. Very good, dutiful, conscientious, and honest public servants. But very little corruption, oh, you know, the nickel and dime stuff or the—occasionally, we'd buy—we at one period of time, we almost all the county vehicles were purchased from one guy named Jake Rose, who had an agency in LaPorte, but this was the usual stuff in those days. There was no flagrant corruption, and there were no flagrant issues, no large county issues.

Interviewer: No issues that would rally a large part of the electorate from one campaign to the other, huh?

Mr. Spiers: No.

Interviewer: In 1950, Shep Crumpacker ran for Congress in this district, and what kind of a politician was he?

Mr. Spiers: Well, he was a hand-picked—that was the year that Marshall Ginthner ran. That was the year we had a lot of fun here. You had to go to the background of that is Marshall Ginthner was a local clothier, very sharp guy, very fine personality, and he developed an interest in politics, but he was not of the political machinery, you see. And had never been a part of the release of all of the Republican machinery because, as I explained to you earlier, they have had all that time and still do, the certain union league exclusive philosophy. They only want as few people as possible in the party. Well, we got sittin' around talkin'. We must have been bored about that time, but in December, Robert Grant had been the congressman here for a number of years. There was some scuttlebutt that he was going to resign, that he was going to retire. Grant would not say, and he kept wheezling, wheezling, wheezling. So I said, we were kicking this around, I said, "Marshall'd be a fabulously attractive candidate, very good one, very intelligent and thoroughly competent. Why don't we assume that Mr. Grant is going to retire and that he won't make the announcement until late. Now, if you get into this race early, announce early, start doing some new things, and develop some strength in Elkhart County and LaPorte County, and in those days we had Marshall County, you may have such a flying start on the dilly dallying Republican hierarchy, which will hand pick a man from St. Joe County as they always have done, that you might beat him in the primary. Now, this is exactly what developed. Marshall Ginther went on a speaking tour around the Rotary Clubs and Lions Clubs and all around the district and announced that he was a candidate for Congress. The result was that by the time Bob Grant finally said very close to the deadline for filing that he was retiring, the South Bend Republicans in those days were pretty much under the control of Tom Bath, who had been secretary of state and was the wheel in the Third District. They finally came up with Shep Crumpacker. He was just kind of a nice easy-going, woolly bear of a man, and very likeable, from an ancient law firm in South Bend, utterly trustworthy, to be the hierarchy, the establishment's person. Well, we ran that—in that primary Marshall Ginther came very, very close to pulling the upset of the year. Now, you've got to remember that when Tom Bath and the powers in St. Joe County settled on Crumpacker, there were some other candidates in the field—two or three others in the field—but they were fringe candidates and they had very little strength, and everybody knew the race was between Crumpacker and Ginther. They delivered the vote in South Bend. That night, and they're all machines over there and they were all counted early—that night Ginther started 20,000 votes behind—they men of St. Joe had all of its county in—he was 28,000 votes behind Crumpacker in St. Joe County, and he came within, as I recall, less



than 1,500. He only lost by about 1,500 when the whole district finally reported.

Interviewer: Marshall Ginther, before that time, he was involved in the Chamber of Commerce here, wasn't he?

Mr. Spiers: Very active in community work, Chamber of Commerce work, very dynamic, yes. Very much a civic leader, civic worker, and highly presentable, very attractive personality, and very competent person. The irony was—the beautiful irony was that that fall, having selected Crumpacker, who was a real dull fudge from the standpoint of personality. He used to go out and shake hands with you like this. A dead fish. He, at the last minutes, Katie Osborne, who was our former county chairman, was then district chairman, was sent over to Michigan City by the District Central Committee with instructions they wanted to hire Ginther and me as PR people for Crumpacker because he was in deep trouble—and he was. And the last month of the campaign, we'd project a whole new image for Crumpacker, and it'd helped. It also helped that this was the year that MacArthur created a brand new war about that time. And that was a vote issue in the congressional race and as a consequence, because of the anti-Truman reaction, Crumpacker did win, but by a very narrow margin. Of course, we always claimed that we turned it around not the war. And, of course, then he went to Washington.

Interviewer: How did you aim this—who did you aim the campaign at? I mean, the average voters? Or...

Mr. Spiers: At that stage, the only thing we were trying to do was humanize Shep Crumpacker, to make him a flesh and blood human being, rather than just a stiff cardboard figure that was hand picked by the ah...and it worked. He really was a very, very nice person. And he was so unbelievably honest that we would write speeches to try to humanize him, and he'd read it and say, "I don't believe this. I don't believe in this, so I won't say it." Okay.

Interviewer: Okay now, in other county offices at that time, which party was dominant?

Mr. Spiers: Well, I think in the '50s, early '50s and through that area, the Republicans were largely dominant, but that is just memory. You have to check your files and see because there's constant shifting back and forth.

Interviewer: Well, what do you think is the main determinant of a Republican or a Democrat here, locally, from your experience? Now, I've read that there is no difference between a Republican and a Democrat in the State of Indiana because both are—the Democrat is so conservative and the Republican is so conservative, they're together.

Mr. Spiers: Locally there is very little ah—these issues very rarely take shape. Locally you are almost strictly a personality.

(Side one of tape ends.)

(Side two of tape begins.)

Well, locally on a local basis, the personality, the person, the individual is infinitively more important than any kind of issues. You have seen elections here I am sure. Cliff Arnold could win by 6,000 votes and at the same time a Republican win by two or three thousand votes or carry the county by two or three thousand votes. I think that happened in 1976, when Governor Bowen carried the county and Senator Lugar carried the county by a very substantial margin, even as Cliff was winning by six or seven thousand votes. Now that's an indication of the strength of individual appeal, as against issues appeal. Now I think you find this on the local level. Once in a while, good men will go down the drain with a great wave like the Goldwater and the anti-Goldwater vote in 1964. The same thing may happen in 1980 with the anti-Carter wave.

Interviewer: What has been the most fascinating incident that you have either witnessed or been involved in in local politics?

Mr. Spiers: Oh, man, that's ah—that's too big an order.

Interviewer: What is one of the many incidents? Other than the ah...

Mr. Spiers: Well, in local politics, in the morality race in 1938, was a classic because there we had Mayor Fedder was running for re-election again, and this was a man who was in control of the city during all this gambling and racketeering, and as much as the paper campaigned, it looked like he was going to get re-elected. And in about the first of October, one of our constables suddenly took it upon himself to jump in a truck one night and start raiding slot machines. And he got a whole truckload of slot machines confiscated, and arrests and all this stuff—theoretically. But we always thought they were going to be held for ransom and then returned; and as it developed, that's substantially what happened. All right, from there they were moved to a warehouse on the West side. At three o'clock in the morning some thugs came, knocked off the guards, the so-called guards of the slot machines, and ran away with all the five they had. They were retrieved and taken away. And they—oh a couple of guys got their heads banged, nothing serious. So the next morning this constable called us, said that he'd been hijacked with all these slot machines; and we went out and we took a picture of the machines that he had left. He had five machines left out of 35 or 40. That's all that they'd been able to save from the raids. It wasn't long before a grand jury was called because the reports were that the mayor's son was involved in the raiding party—again, old good old Lenny, the same good old Lenny. So, and of course, with one of our leading racketeers, George Nahas (sp?). The grand jury convened, and about this time we were after—constantly after this constable, when you going to smash these slot machines? So one day he calls us, we want to take pictures of him as he smashes the slot machines. One day he called, he said, "I just smashed the slot machines." I said, "What the hell, you promised to let us take a picture of you smashing." "Well," he said, "I just smashed 'em. So you want to take a picture?" I said, "Okay." So we go out and here's a pile that's smashed (indecipherable) sledge hammers (indecipherable). So we run a picture in the paper, and that night we got a call from one of my informants down in nether regions of the... He says, "You don't think that guy really smashed those fine new hundred dollar machines, do you?" I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Why don't you examine those photographs of yours, the one you took at the time of the raid, and the one you took at the smashing." So we dug 'em out. We blew 'em up and looked. There wasn't even the faintest resemblance. You

could see the snouts were curved on these old ancient. What he had done was smashed five old junkers, and the five beautiful new machines.

Interviewer: What happened?

Mr. Spiers: So we then went immediately to the grand jury with our pictures and to the prosecutor, who looked like we had just handed him a handful of worms to eat when we laid them on his lap. So the result was the grand jury very shortly before the election in November, right at the end of October, indicted the big gambler, Mr. Nahas, the mayor's son, Lenny Fedder, and the constable for perjury. Now this happened just before election. As a consequence a Republican, Fred Parker, was elected mayor. The city had finally had it up to here, and so they threw out the Fedders.

Interviewer: Now how long was Parker mayor?

Mr. Spiers: Four years. And then the Democrats—you see four years took 'em into World War II, and all the men were gone. All our men were gone from the staff. I was in the Air Force and all the rest of 'em were gone. We had kind of an all girl choir running the newspaper during the war years, and they didn't have the competence to conduct and continue an anti-racketeering campaign. And Ken Fedder was re-elected when we came back from service and he was back in office. He was re-elected in '42 or '43, whenever that election.

Interviewer: Okay now, Fedder was mayor for another four years?

Mr. Spiers: Yeah.

Interviewer: And then...

Mr. Spiers: '47 was when he was beaten by—I don't know whether he ran in '47 or not, but, ah, I don't think he did. I think he quit.

Interviewer: He quit, and is that around the time...

Mr. Spiers: That's when Russell Heilman was elected, the bright young Republican hope.

Interviewer: But that set a new trend in politics here in Michigan City.

Mr. Spiers: Here in Michigan City because outside of that one aborted case where Fred Miller had been elected mayor in the middle of all that scandal, there hadn't been a Republican mayor here in a long time. Well, since old Judge Tuttle—back in the 20s.

Interviewer: But then, up until that point, if I remember correctly, it was that election that changed the complexion of local politics in that every four years the office changed (indecipherable)...

Mr. Spiers: (indecipherable) right. Now Heilman was re-elected. '47, he was re-elected in '51, and then after that—no wait a minute, then Kenny Fedder was re-elected, wasn't he? I think you may find that. You'd better check your figures.

Interviewer: Now, are there any issues that come up biannually or annually before an election? What issues come up every year before an election?

Mr. Spiers: You mean local issues?

Interviewer: Of local concern. Are there any perennial issues?

Mr. Spiers: No, I don't think so. There'd be all kinds of new ones from each—each one new to its particular time and, you know, moment in time.

Interviewer: Okay, in your dealing with politics in the county, do you think the electorate in LaPorte County is somewhat sophisticated? Or out in left field?

Mr. Spiers: I think the electorate in LaPorte County is very perceptive, very intelligent, and very selective, pretty damned smart.

Interviewer: Now, do you base that on the upbringing, the education, or just tradition?

Mr. Spiers: Well, since 1962, I think it's because we have had this PIP program in Michigan City that you have fed into the political machinery of both parties. A very large number of citizens with an entirely different attitude towards politics, citizens who bring to politics the same attitude of service that they bring to community fund, Red Cross, or any other voluntary work for the community. I would say that today at least 35% of both organizations are composed of PIP graduates and people with the PIP philosophy; and when that figure becomes 75%, you're going to see some really revolutionary changes in politics in this county, even more so than you already have. Now this county has some very high caliber public servants in the last 20 years, and it's no accident. It is in part because in the early years, the crusading by the newspaper for cleaner government and cleaner politics, followed by the People in Politics program, which began in 1962 and really infiltrated, heavily infiltrated, both parties with this new philosophy, the philosophy of service. These kind of people won't permit (indecipherable) and nuts and crooks and thieves and bums to win a primary. They feel it is their party's duty not to be neutral in a primary, but to get rid of the bums and to create—or to nominate the best person possible from their party, and they do. They have an effect.

Interviewer: Now, how many people have, off hand off the top of your head, how many people have actually gone through People in Politics?

Mr. Spiers: Roughly 1,500 people took that action course in practical politics between 1962 and 1972.

Interviewer: And what was your role in that, sir?

Mr. Spiers: Well, we created it. The News Dispatch was the sponsor and a group of about—well, we started with a half a dozen guys who got—and gals—who got interested in this thing and invited a steering committee really, a cross-section of the leading people in the community. These included the superintendent of schools, the president of the League of Women Voters, the labor leaders, the chairmen of both political parties, two or three people

who were known as movers and shakers in the community and presented this idea to them. We said, "Now, do you like this well enough to agree to serve as the steering committee, supervise the thing. The News Dispatch will sponsor it, publicize it, and help you to start it." They listened, they examined the course, they heard an analysis of the course by Bob Schwartz, for example, from Purdue, who is a hell of a sharp guy. Joe Alinsky was involved in it. He at the time was a manager of Dave's Television out here, a very brilliant guy, who gave reaction of a businessman to this thing. County chairmen both reacted to it. They said, "Yes, we will do this." We said, "Fine." Well we told them, we made this complete presentation of the program, what we had in mind, what would happen, what could happen. They took a break and said, "Now go away and talk about it, have coffee, and come back in ten minutes and decide and we'll see how you react." They came back and said, "Yeah, we'd like to do it." I said, "Fine. Here is your assignment." We had them all prepared. You know the bane of most committees, you know. They sit there and belabor trivia until it strains from mercy or get into involved, aggressive discussions and all this jazz. Well, when you get people like Bob Schwartz from Purdue and Joe Alinsky and a few others, we had blueprinted this whole thing, say, if they say yes, here's where we're going and here's what each one must do. And those assignments were made and one week later, everything was in motion. Now, the basic way, at that time, you know who the hell—who's going to go to a political school? Will you go to take a political course? It's anathema to the average person. So he said, "If you can get a hundred people to take that course, it will be a miracle in Michigan City." We said our goal was 150. We're going to do it, and we're going to do it by heavily publicizing the thing and promoting it in the newspaper, most of all we're going to make it the in thing of the year. (Indecipherable) You ain't with it if you ain't in PIP. That's got to be it. Well, with these wonderful people, now believe me, we had the finest bunch of people on that great (indecipherable) committee. Everybody was a mover and a shaker. Everybody was a guy who got things done, or gal, like Anita Bowser from Purdue, I'm sure you heard of her. They were just the cream. Well, they were selected for that reason. That thing so completely exploded that it damned near overwhelmed us. We had planned for 100 to 150 enrollees, which meant we would need six to eight discussion leaders, two for each class, 20 in each class. We got 450 the first year. Well, that meant we had to find new places for them. Places for the course. We had to have a flock of discussion leaders. We finally resolved that followed by the oldest elite bit in the world saying, "We need some highly special people from first class to be discussion leaders." We enrolled—we started two classes. Joe Alinsky and I were the discussion leaders in those two classes. We gave, in those days it was nine sessions in this action course altogether, eight regular sessions and then a politics—the politician speaks. We ran them four sessions, and as soon as we had them four sessions into the course itself, we stay in turn. We started another class even while they were finishing up their own. And that's the way we got the thing started. We got 450 of 'em done. The immediate product of that whole program was that there were 500 people—400 and some people—all chomping at the bit wanting to do in 1963. The Democrats had that ancient philosophy of don't call us, we'll call you. Now these people were (indecipherable) they volunteered to work. But we didn't give a damn. We said this is a non-it's not a non-partisan—a bipartisan program we wanted. It sure as hell is not non-partisan because we want it to be partisan. It's a bipartisan program. We don't care where you go from here as long as you get into one party or the other, and get active. Well, they'd go down to the Democratic headquarters, knock on the door, and they'd say, "Don't call us, we'll call you." Now you've got to remember distinctly in one of the classes I was working with little Phil Schrader, who is now the city clerk. He's a terrific guy. He had

three bright young kids in there, really sharp young gals. They were about 17, 18, 19, in that time, just out of school. One was just out of school, one was a senior, so coach—they were Democrats by inclination. They wanted to be. So coach says, "You come down to headquarters or you go down to the headquarters and sign up." Fine, they went down to the headquarters and signed up. So, this was in the beginning of the following year, in '63, when we were into the second program, by which time Randy Miller was involved in the primary race. We had set up the headquarters and I was his campaign manager. And he saw those little girls come down, and when they came back—I forgot one night they were in our class, in Schrader's class and mine. I said, "Well, what kind of reaction did you get?" "Oh, you know, kind of negative." He said, "Nobody seemed to want us to do anything. They said they'd call us." And I kind of glanced. I could just see Schrader wince because he knew what was happening. I said, "Okay, girls, I'll tell you what. After the meeting tonight, I'll take you over to our headquarters. It's right next door, see what you see over there, see what you like." We got those three girls in, we showed 'em what was going on. They said, "Well, what can we do?" Here's a kit. We had a thing we called Randy's Rangers. All you have to do is go out and get five sure votes for the primary for Randy, you got a gold star on that chart. By the time that primary was run those girls had about ten gold stars apiece up on that chart. They would—we gave 'em a special award afterwards to the three little tigers, and Coach Schrader just shook his head after. He said, "You S-O-B." He said, "You stole the three best people we could have had." He said, "Not only that, those girls will never again be Democrats. Never." And they won't. They'll be Republicans all their life. And, of course, because of the open door policy, Randy was running against the organization, the county chairman, Mr. Cruiser (sp?) had announced that his personal choice was Dick Anderson. They rigged a jerry built, phony endorsing committee, slating committee. They slated Mr. Anderson, and they announced the organization was for Mr. Anderson, and we played that to hilt, poor old Randy and what nice young man to be so beat on by the organization, what a shame, you know, the underdog, and all. When in actuality, an organization isn't one thing more than people working in precincts for a common cause or a single person. We knew for a fact the last week of the primary, the other side had less than 50 active workers, 40 of whom were fighting with each other already. And Randy had 475 by actual count of active workers in the precinct. And the results showed. He'd not only feed the organization, Lord God Almighty, he doubled, oh, virtually doubled the vote of Anderson. But that was the first immediate product of PIP.

Interviewer: Now these people are still active...

Mr. Spiers: Many of them are.

Interviewer: ...in politics.

Mr. Spiers: Oh, some have, some have drifted away. Some have left town, but many of them are still active in politics. Berl Burgwald, who is on the city council today, was, I think, a 14-year-old high school kid when he took PIP, and he stayed with it right—he was a great fan of it, and he stayed with it and worked with it all through the years.

Interviewer: Well, okay, I'd like to talk with you just briefly about the power of the local organ and the role it plays in politics.

Mr. Spiers: Today or yesterday?

Interviewer: Today. Say the role it played three and a half years ago...

Mr. Spiers: Which organ?

Interviewer: ... in the run for mayor in Michigan City.

Mr. Spiers: The News Dispatch.

Interviewer: The News Dispatch.

Mr. Spiers: Well, in what way? Power isn't there. Power is long gone. As I...

Interviewer: I recall an editorial, an editorial that changed a lot of minds, or let's say changed a lot of minds from indecision to swing toward one candidate. Do you think that...

Mr. Spiers: You're going to tell me that the editorial was counterproductive and that the decision was to go not for Miller but for LaRocco? I don't know where you got your information, but the polls that were taken at that time showed exactly the opposite. Now that's pure Democratic baloney that was put out at that time. That was the only way they could react to that. They put on their piety (indecipherable) and said, "oh, why it's a terrible thing you're saying about truck drivers." Highly emotional baloney, pure baloney. We made the basis, we made the recommendation on the basis of competence. We made the recommendation on the basis of our belief that the prosecutor, the Democratic prosecutor, and the Democratic deputy prosecutor, and the Democrats had overblown the hell out of that investigation, that insurance investigation—and they had. And on the basis of simple competence, that the editorial was written. And today, there are a great many people in this town that come to us and say, "Well, I hate to admit it, but you were right." Now, you go out and talk to Tom Burns at WMCB, who was taking some pretty sharp spot surveys, random surveys, but very, very scientifically done, and within 72 hours of the appearance of that editorial, there was a shift of about 8-10%. There was an enormous area of indecision prior to that. And there was a pronounced strong shift not to LaRocco, but to Miller.

Interviewer: But, okay, the ah...

Mr. Spiers: You were a victim of Democratic myth making. Go beyond the superficial.

Interviewer: I guess that's right, but as I understood it, its'—okay this is my opinion and it may not be right or whatever, but it's—I was of the influence that it was a pro-Miller editorial but it turned out and turned around and backfired. People misunderstood.

Mr. Spiers: The Democrats wanted you to believe that. The Democrats very cleverly manipulated the thing in that direction and in that manner. It was very, very sharply done by them. If I'd have been in their position, I'd have done the same thing. What else could they do? They said, they goddamned the newspaper instead of the opponent—very sharp. But you see another thing has happened between the '30s and today. The press itself has gotten itself into

the public doghouse. The press is no longer the Gallihad of yesterday. The press is suspect. Watergate brought that to a head, the overblown, the obvious, the overblown, exaggerated nature of Watergate driving a president out of office. Most of it motivated and initiated and pushed and prodded by recognizable eastern establishment liberal media—the networks, The Washington Post, The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, the Louisville Courier-Journal, the St. Louis Post Dispatch—you could swing the axis right around. All clamoring like a pack of dogs on the heels of Mr. Nixon, and then not long afterwards, followed by what they did to Burt Lance; and this was so flagrant. This was like Dracula has got to have blood every night. All right, the press has worked itself out of the public's trust and into the public's doghouse, and so when the media today—any media—suggests to, or presumes to tell the public how to vote, the public will say, "Go to hell."

Interviewer: That's right. I think the public has reached a level of education and understanding, edification that it makes up its own mind.

Mr. Spiers: But you see The News Dispatch is a little different, a little different feeling in this community because of the fact that for nearly 40 years, we have a demonstrated, clear cut record of battling and battling damned hard for good clean government to the advantage not one bit of the newspaper itself. Now the year I managed Randy's campaign, and said, "My God, he's going to be the big king wheel of this town," was when he was elected in '63. The day after he took office, I was off on a 61-day journalistic trip around the southeast, south and north Pacific. I had no interest whatsoever. I sat in on a couple of the conferences to make damned sure that good men were going to be appointed to key positions, and that's all we cared about. Had no interest whatsoever of being a part of that operation after that because from that point on, the newspaper is going to sit in judgment on him, and damned sharp critical judgment. So...

Interviewer: What do you think about the future locally? You said that when People in Politics courses will continue to have an effect on the political scene here locally, ah...

Mr. Spiers: I think there's two more things that are going to happen real quick in the next few years. One is there's going to be a reversal of this turn away from politics and there's going to be a turn toward politics. The kids coming out of school realize that this cop out is not the way, that the more they cop out the more they turn away from politics, the more they are going to be exploited by it. And, therefore, the answer is to get in up to here, and wham, at the grassroots where we started in PIP. The second thing is the League of Women Voters here already has approved by its board the revival of PIP in Michigan City. They are going to undertake to revive it, and re-institute those courses. I think you will see a hell of a lot of people take those action courses and begin to move into the root structure of the political machinery. This is where it's got to be. What you're seeing in Washington, people are not dumb. They're seeing congressmen who are so entrenching themselves. Have you any idea what the re-election rate is for congressmen?

Interviewer: No.

Mr. Spiers: 96%. 96% of the congressmen who choose to seek re-election are re-elected. You know why? Because they have given themselves staffs of 19



people, budgets of \$600,000 a year under the subterfuge they are now giving this service to their constituents. Well that's exactly what they're doing. If it just happens to be that the constituents also are voters, well isn't that strange? Now, you were seeing congressmen between elections having town hall meetings. That's the big new thing. We used to call them coffee clutches or ward meetings, or precinct rallies. Now they masquerade as town hall meetings and the congressman comes home in his \$50,000 mobile office, which you and I paid for, and he rambles around the district and he stops here and he stops there and what he is doing is pure and simple political campaigning with the taxpayers money. Then he goes back to Washington and he introduces and pleads for a so-called political reform bill, which won't let his opponent spend more than X-dollars on the same kind of campaign. Now, they are entrenching them—the people know this. There is only one way the people have—the people have more contempt for Congress today than for Mr. Carter or for Mr. Nixon. The only way they're going to throw 'em out is to burrow into the precincts and throw them out in the primary or the general election themselves because by doing the precinct work.

Interviewer: Okay. Now, I'd like your 30-plus years of wisdom, in and out of politics, in giving us, and giving me or the listeners of this tape, a prediction, what is going to happen to Brademas in November.

Mr. Spiers: You can't make a prediction in May about what's going to happen to Brademas in November until you see one of about six things. Is Thorson going to be able to develop and will the media in the Third District, which always have favored Brademas, is the media going to permit it to happen? Is Thorson going to be able to develop the issues that are Brademas' fundamental vulnerabilities? Mr. Brademas is Mr. Education. He has claimed this for years. Well, the people are somewhat less than enchanted by federal education today. They're saying, "What the hell has happened to our educational system?" And they are saying, "Well, my God, maybe it's all these crazy federal schemes that have been forced on us. We're turning out kids that can't read, can't write, can't calculate, what the hell has gone wrong?" What's gone wrong is the federal bureaucracy imposed on the system. And who is the architect of this? Mr. Brademas. He can't escape it. He has bragged about it for ten years. Okay, Ken Thorson developed it as a viable issue in the campaign. Does he have the skill, and will the media help him or permit it even? Number two, there is an enormous turn away in the country, in my opinion, from all schemes liberal—the failure of welfare, the failure of education, the failure of this insane spending, deficit spending, inflation.

(Tape ends abruptly here.)