

Gary Greaves Oral History Interviews Digitization Project

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George Cooley Interview

Cooley: An apartment building for Louie from elderly Asian American people. And you people go around the backdoor and you're gonna find another political sight. And it just pissed the hell out of me, and we had to guard it. He had a-- down the hall late at night, we had a screaming match look-- and here I am, you know, looking up at that woman proceed about six foot-- so anyway, funny things happen then. I, well I got my opinion deep by Randy Rebelle. I don't know what else to say but it was an interesting time because it was a time of change, at least the four years I served. Ushered in a whole new era because the old timers were very, very close to the downtown business community. I am told, I've never seen this in writing, that in the olden days, the David Levine days, at least that four others that went with him and probably mostly old timers that he gave these blessings to on council. They had such little opposition when they ran that they just let it be known that they needed \$10,000 or whatever to run in the chamber type people who raised that forum and won, swoop was redeemed at the laws hearing. So-- and that all changed with the group of us that went in, because when I went in in '69, Janette went in, Larcome went in, who else went in?

Greaves: Timothy.

Cooley: Tell us the law we've been in, I think--

Greaves: That would be Gordons--

Cooley: I thought he went in in '67. You might've been '69.

Greaves: It wasn't to Chad then who went in '79?

Cooley: Yes, I mean Miller too, they were a couple years into-- it's so, it was a complete flop-over, you know, for many 70 year old people, nine year old getting. Kinda like in Washington D.C.

Greaves: It's been that way in Seattle forever hasn't it?

Cooley: Oh yeah, it had been. It'd always been old time guy, most of them being successful business men. Floyd Miller-- excuse me-- Floyd Miller was the one guy in community union besides Charley Carroll. Charley Carroll was very popular in the community transit union. Floyd Miller was out of one of them I think. But the rest of them like one guy in the newspaper in the Ballard area, they're all dead now. Mrs. Edwards-- I forget what the hell she came out of-- I didn't know him that well, really. And I think the city's better off for it but it took a terrible toll because I got divorced at that time, I wasn't running around or anything, you know, it just caught, I put such energy into that, I personally did, that it caused-- I'm not using this as a total excuse but it puts a strain on a family, you know, our dedicated that much to keep going to

meetings all the time-- I didn't like errand. It's not an easy life that you have a normal human because-- but it was a good experience and I don't-- the best job I ever had was right after that year, it's funny. I mean talking about a job because I was prepared to get back to-- I'd taken a-- I had been moved to-- I was a northwest and promoted by Rexall to be the northwest district sales manager the year I ran and won. I took a slightly [? bonet 3:54 ?] to do it, and I took a leave when I got elected. But actually, a national company or whoever saved a job for you four years away. So I started looking around as soon as I got the-- and I got word that John Kelly, the city treasurer, wanted to talk with me. He had an assistant position open, and the only thing I asked was, "You mean you have no one in here you're going to promote out of?" He had a staff of 40 something, and he said, "No." And I guess we kinda clicked because I'd been finance channeling for 10 years. And so I took over, and for eight years I was in that job as assistant city treasurer, and what I liked about it is I invested everyday the unused millions of dollars the city has in different accounts. And when I say I invested them, I invested them in very short-term things that were guaranteed totally, and I-- we made millions of dollars in inverse that the uni-- by the end of the year, excuse me, for the general opponent was steady. I loved that. The part I didn't like was John set on a lot of things that he didn't soon invest in but I did. I kept the basic huge journal everyday of how much I put out. I called banks and I stayed within the state. A number of treasurers, some of them, took chances with out-of-state but we stayed within the state where it was deeper guarantee. What I mainly did was call the banks and asked the repo rate it's called. Repo rate is it's called a repurchase agreement. If I had a loan, see first if they had it in their portfolio to do it. If I meet them overnight or over on the weekend, 10 million dollars, they had their own outright 10 million dollars in securities, and set them aside in our name. In case that bank went bankrupt overnight, we earned the security, we could sell them in the market and recover our money. So that was our guarantees on this stuff, and the auditors checked the name, maintained that we were totally safe and that was within state law and everything. So I enjoyed that job. The part I didn't enjoy was John Kelly was a CPA [Certified Public Accountant] at-- very accomplished guy, nicest guy I've ever almost never worked with. And the first day I took over, he said, "Okay now George, you're in charge of that whole office out there," and I had no rules, they went in there and came in. And I had to do nothing but break up little petty arguments. This woman been there for 10 years and she was mad at that woman and then there were 15, you know, that kind of crap.

Greaves: To retrace a little bit, what'd you do? In R.H. [Reginal Heber] Thomson, what were some of the things that you did?

Cooley: Well, we went down every year in either highway department hearings or city hearings or any and just said it would destroy our neighborhood. Why are you bringing that freeway? What we said about it was to put a good name on it because R.H. Thomson, it contributed a hell a lot for the city. Bringing them the freeway parallel through our city. Our position in all the other communities that thought it was Seattle was kind of like an hourglass where someone said it's coarsed dead, you know, it starts out kind of white in the South and then kinda narrows downtown. So these babies are gonna bring a second one right on through the heart and come right out through Lake City Way or Burien. And we looked at it as catering to suburban people or people completely out of the area, facilitating their movement through our city. That isn't the way you do the planning really, we didn't think. And so we did-- we just hammered the hell out of the highway department and the-- at the hearings, you know, we would show up in numbers and we wrote copiously and testified at any of the hearings. And finally, the pressure got so great that they stopped in Vegas, abandoned. What a lot of people didn't even know, that I later learned through all the lobbying that Gary, is even when they start-- see I, you have to understand when I came here in '55 or so, there was only-- old-99 going through the city. That's a law avenue and it rode about out to Boeing, that was the main highway going through the city. And when they

built the first one, it was already a full grown conclusion I guess when they started it. They had looked at three or four options. The-- we weren't back in discovery this if they had an A, B, C, and D, I guess you call channels. And when A would've abort, they were knocked out on that because that was the furthest toward Lake Washington and it was going up north through Lake City, would've hit even [? Denmere Dormbreeman's 9:45 ?] house, would've been right in the path. People like Janette Williams and Benson and those have been affected.

Greaves: Yeah.

Cooley: Yeah, or later, you know, they had active then. And then there was a-- maybe B was the one that was gonna choose and C was onto the west of that. We just-- and we thought-- and we also disputed the numbers of by the-- we're building to try meet the capacity because the philosophy we had like a lot of people who would resist the freeway. Would you build them to meet the peak? And we're settled at, you know, 10 hours the rest of the day, it's obvious what we need, I think in long range is some kind of mass transit like the service that, well you know, the bulk would be people coming into the city to work and sure, weren't Vancouver people have gotta get through the area some way they belong, south, but we provided that with a [? reem 10:54 ?] road around the link now. Anyway, that was a very controversial issue and it was long standing. And we were successful, I think, probably highway people thought we were all a bunch of nuts, you know?

Greaves: Do you think that that something new that they-- that the highway department had never really had to go up against that type of thing though, was that yes?

Cooley: Oh, I'd say it was the beginning then, sure. It slopped over into I-90 [Interstate-90] because Oberg were gonna build, what was it, two more bridges across over there or something.

Greaves: There were 16 lanes and then cut it down.

Cooley: They just had a different mentality all together, and it didn't happen. They did, you know, they just looked-- they looked at the map of the in a different way that-- I've often felt very, very sorry for people that had lived in a very quiet neighborhood and then they go I-5 [Interstate-5], maybe they're only a block away from I-5 but that roar has got to be terrible. And as a body that acclimates to it but it's not really funny.

Greaves: Also the valley near there.

Cooley: Yeah!

Greaves: The property goes down, it has to. Nobody wants to live looking out on the--

Cooley: So anyway, they worked years to-- and boy did I know those guys at that time, most of them, and if you've never-- there's a good guy that'd been, he worked at Boeing, I think he's retired now, that came along and was acting in Lake City and peruse Vermont, that community council that we started. Dave [? Lefade 12:45 ?] if you've never talked to him, [? Yoda 12:49 ?] looking out, nice guy, makes beautiful ink carved boats, they're models I remember. Dave [? Lefade 12:58 ?], L-E-F-B-B-R-E or something like that, lives in Lake City area. But he, he took-- he was president later. He fought those highway battles with me too, he and his wife.

Greaves: And so, did lift come about as a--

Cooley: Yeah!

Greaves: --real response to the R.H. Thomson?

Cooley: R.H. Thomson. I was told the history by old timers when I got involved in it. The third had been a-- excuse me-- Lake City community council, at one time 20 years before or something, and it just kinda dissolved in that way. I don't remember if they ever formed themselves around some issue or not. But the only thing that was operating back then was that Chamber of Commerce. Now I know some of the Chamber of Commerce people because I knew an optometrist who was very active in this. But that wasn't satisfying our because we started out, sure, wanting to have a say with the city and what the hell happens to our area out there but primarily the stuff that R.H. Thomson pre-worked. And we were successful I think. We were-- there were groups formed in-- because we met with them, I'm trying to think of the area now, just north of the university is-- was they had--

Greaves: Sandpoint or?

Cooley: Huh?

Greaves: Sandpoint?

Cooley: No, no, no, that's a little too deep-- east. Just coming north is Ravenna. Now Ravenna formed one down there too, a community group to fight the R.H. Thomson so that there were a bunch of us that joined together.

Greaves: So a lot of community groups came about? Okay so that--

Cooley: Yes they did.

Greaves: And then, after that, what other things did Lake City community council taken on?

Cooley: Well, we were interested in trying to stop, trying to see-- I guess you got more concentrated commercial development and not so much keep on with the strip developing area that, you know, if you started, we got about 100 in [? dried more 15:31 ?] on Lake City way, clear until 140 if you got the business on each side of you, and it's only about half a block deep. And it'd be far better, you know, from the aesthetics as well as the convenience of everything because when you get strip development you get it so damn car-orientated. You know, people, if they wanna go to that cleaners, they have to jump into their car and then they have to go to QFC in Lake City shopping center or whatever. At least that was our idea so we were constantly [? touting 16:12 ?] with the city planners to try to, you know, do anything that wouldn't deduce to make it more convenient for people to develop in a more concentrated manner.

Greaves: In other words, have the stores in their neighborhoods as opposed to having everything on the strip?

Cooley: Yeah. Car dealers are the worst to course, they always got, you know, they're spread out and they cover a block or two, and have banners everywhere and all that. But it's--

Greaves: So that changed the face then of Lake City.

Cooley: A little bit, a little bit. The people-- the Lake City Chamber of Commerce is really fine. They-- the one big issue when I first got started and everything was they wanted the city and I know a guy, Reed Martin, that was successful in doing that. He went in and changed Bothell Way, is what it was known as in those days, to be changed Des Moines to Lake City Way. And when I tried to get support from him once when I was running, he said, "No, I can't do it for you George. I like you" and blah, blah, blah, "But Ed Riley will stick with us and fight for Lake City Way," and he's on the council now, so that shows you in '69, I tried to get this guy's support and then--

Greaves: What was his name?

Cooley: Reed Martin. And-- so he and the others, you know, the business being one of them died the other day, you know, was very active in that area. Yeah, we really tried to do it but we were mainly focused around R.H. Thomson. I make-- I mean, we tried to broaden out and get people to, you know, be more interested in their immediate community.

Greaves: Were you successful at that? Dragging people from the neighborhood?

Cooley: Yeah we had a lot that weren't done. We had a lot more. We'd have large meetings. But boy I'll tell ya, a freeway coming somewhere in the area, there's nothing like it as a motivator to get people out. Everybody's got an opinion and most of it is negative, you know.

Greaves: The origins of check, you know, what were the first things-- I mean, when did that--

Cooley: Well there were-- yeah, the YMCA downtown. They were launching discussion groups and some of these were geared around-- I'm trying, I can't think of the [? ostracize 18:47 ?] of it. I think it was in [? unisfully 18:50 ?], was probably is a responsible thing and I can't think of the man's name. The man was a retired guy living in Wallingford that was very active in the [? inamunisfully 19:05 ?]. I remember he was fascinated, fascinating because where he needed money for his livelihood, I think it was Baltimore, Maryland, and he was a lighting, a stage lighting manufacturer or something like that. But he was involved in that and he retired out a year, I think I'm sure he did now, and he was a very civically active guy. You know, here's a retired guy who wanted to stay civically active. And we used to have those lunches down there where we can either bring our own lunch in or buy a YMCA type lunch, and we talked about the different problems of the city. And I think out of that, a lot of the young people just started forming the chair. And it might've been John Watson. See, one time John Watson, Lem Howell, and John Miller were all in a little law firm and cell. And I don't know who invited me to them but I got to into those when I could with my work and we would discuss different things that were acting, you know, affecting the city. And out of that became a bigger awareness for me, to me, that boy it was a very laissez-faire city council basically. They just floated in.

Greaves: So at that time, you were the Rexall distributor, what got you interested in that?

Cooley: In these things?

Greaves: What kind of plugged you into that?

Cooley: I presume-- well is-- the people I sort of meeting, really Gary. They-- like Lem Howell in my district has started meeting. And you have to understand one thing. Lem Howell-- excuse me-- he was a bit of a wild man but I don't hold that against him total, was a precinct committee man in my district out in Lake City area. So I got to know him. When he was in this law

partnership with John Watson and John Miller, they were Republican, young Republican. Lem Howell had been active in the young Democrats, I think, going through the UW [University of Washington]. I think it's the exposure of probably talking with Lem or others, Arney Bear, this guy that lost the campaign and lived out there, this young lawyer, that got me down to going to some of those lunches. And the freedom that I had as the district sales manager at that time just gave me a little more freedom, and when I was a sales`man, I was out many nights a week, you know. I wasn't a boozier so I wasn't hitting bars, and I just stuck to the business and went back to the most well read books. But when I got to stay in Seattle, because they originally offered me a job in LA at the home office and I wouldn't go there for I just wouldn't live in LA at that time, then they tried to get me to come to Portland to be the district sales manager, I said, "No." So finally they said, "You stay in Seattle and then fly outta there to be with the demon." So I did it then, and I was at for the last, I think it was about three years before I got elected.

Greaves: Spend another 45 minutes or something. My wife's out in the car so.

Cooley: Sure! Why-- why didn't you bring her in? My God.

Greaves: Oh well--

Cooley: She could've watched Big Bird on TV or whatever. Veto, and this woman tried to get me to keep on going with it because it was staff and as well as elected one but hell, Ed Riley died and all these guys that served on there with me and I just thought the last man's munching for me, I'm not coming. See, I'm really quite busy now, Gary. I tutor little kids in grade school, two days a week, and I help out over with help one day a week, and I'm taking a computer class and the inner writing class, so I try to stay busy.

Greaves: That's terrific. You know, John Miller was kind of--