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Interview with Frank Reilly

Date: 20 July 2010

Location: Home of Frank Reilly, Chicago, IL.

Present: Frank Reilly, Rita Reilly, Dr. David W. Veenstra, and Jason Marcus Waak

Transcribed by Roger L. Robinson

(the interview has already begun)

Frank Reilly: All right, when you're ready, I'm going to tell you what I know. And then we can go from there.

Jason Marcus Waak: Okay. That sounds good.

FR: The Richard J. Daley Law Firm was formed in 1946. It consisted of four members. There was Richard J. Daley, William Lynch, who was his partner, and two associates, who were Joseph A. Power and George J. Schaller. Their original office was a temporary location. It was at One Thirty North Wells Street. In the forties, it was desired by many law firms to be located on La Salle Street. It was a prestigious location. So the law firm moved in there in either 1947 or 1948. Just to show you how prestigious it was, the law firm of Kirkland Ellis, one of the most prestigious law firms in Chicago or the world now, was located on the top two or three floors of Thirty Three North La Salle. The law firm moved in there in either 1947 or 1948.

Now, in 1948, they wanted another lawyer. George Schaller recommended me to Lynch. When I graduated from high school, I entered the De Paul University College of Commerce. We were seated alphabetically and Schaller sat next to me. Then, when I entered the college of law, a professor again seated us alphabetically. And there was Schaller. So Schaller knew me from the school. So when I was interviewed by William Lynch, he said, "I'm going to let you start now. But you've got to be approved by Richard J. Daley." I said, "All right." I never was (DWV laughs). But I found out afterwards why that was.

Richard J. Daley, in 1948, was wearing four hats. He was or had been a state senator from his district. He was the ward committeeman from his district. He was the

head of the law firm. And he was also the deputy county clerk, which was an appointed office. He had a big office in the county building. It was my job to deliver mail there. He later became the elected county clerk. So I thought, “This man was a busy man (FR laughs).”

So in 1949 and in 1950, Richard Daley wanted William Lynch to have a meeting on the first or second Saturday in September, to go over every file in the office. It was my job, as the low man on the totem pole, to go into the vault and inventory every file that we had. Now, it wasn't a major job, because the firm was rather new back then. But I was the one who went in. I had a catalogue of all of the cases. In those days, instead of one, there were five separate elected courts in Cook County. There was the Circuit Court of Cook County, the Superior Court of Cook County, the County Court of Cook County, the Probate Court of Cook County, and there was the Municipal Court of Chicago. They were all consolidated into one court later.

But I can tell you this incident. William Lynch conducted the meeting. And we were stopped by Richard J. Daley. It turned out that one of the cases in our law firm was a result of a law that was passed in Springfield while Richard J. Daley was a state senator. He was very interested in the fact that we had a minor case. He was either the sponsor of the bill, or he pushed the bill and got it passed. So that's something I haven't forgotten. He stopped and talked about that fact. And it was kind of ironic that we had a case in his office involving a law that he had passed. There were no more Saturday morning meetings in September of each year. That's because, as you know, Adlai Stevenson appointed him as the director of revenue. And he was elected as the county clerk.

Now, what's the next incident with Richard J. Daley? Oh, I can just tell you how I know him. We were married in 1951. We went over to get our license. He sent for us to come in. We had our picture taken with him. He came to our wedding on August 18, 1951.

You probably already know this. But I learned this because I was in the law firm. This was, again, in 1949 or 1950. Richard J. Daley got a hold of Lynch and said, “We're going to go to a Chicago Cardinals football game tonight.” I found out that we had the original members of the firm. And he had one personal friend named Peter Moore. We

went to Comisky Park at night. I found out that he was a Chicago Cardinal football fan. I don't know how known that is.

David W. Veenstra: I don't think that's known at all.

JMW: No.

FR: Well, I'm just saying that this is something that happened.

JMW: Right. We knew that he went to Chicago Bears foot ball games. But we didn't know about the Chicago Cardinal games.

FR: I, myself, was a Chicago Cubs fan and a Chicago Bears fan. But anyway, it was a fact that we went to dinner as his gift. Again, it was 1949 or 1950. It was in some area near the ballpark. Now, I'm going to skip to 1976. This is something that's very interesting. 1976 was the year he died. But in late spring or early summer, William Lynch died, who was his partner and a federal judge. The mayor got a hold of us, Schaller, Power, and me. He said, "I want all of the original members of the law firm to be honorary pallbearers." Daley had me as an original member, even though I came in eighteen months later.

So I met him. The funeral mass for Lynch was on Thirty-seventh Street. There was a limousine there. Richard J. Daley crawled into the limousine and sat behind the driver. And I followed him in. The other two lawyers, Schaller and Power, also got in. This was not a sad funeral, by the way. It went to some cemetery on the far southwest side of Chicago. There was a running commentary from Richard J. Daley about every neighborhood we went through. Now, underscore the word neighborhood.

He talked about neighborhoods in detail. He was not mentioning wards and so forth. For example, what did he say when we went through the first neighborhood? He'd say, "Now, the ethnic background of this neighborhood used to be another ethnic background." It was the same thing as we went along a little further. Then he'd describe another neighborhood. He'd say, "Look how nice the bungalows are here. Look at how

nice the lawns are and how nice the place is kept up.” So he talked about neighborhoods all the way to the cemetery.

My mind was boggled by the knowledge that this man had. He had been the mayor for twenty-one years. He knew every neighborhood like he lived there. I can't emphasize that enough, because it's impressed on my mind. The words just keep tumbling out of him. He talked neighborhood, neighborhood, and neighborhood. That I learned because I was a member of the law firm. That's how it came about, not because I was a close personal friend of the mayor.

Now, there's one other item that I can think of. When Richard J. Daley was running for mayor between January and April, well, let me back up for a second. What did his office consist of in 1948? I should know this. This was at Thirty Three North La Salle Street. There were three different rooms for lawyers. Richard J. Daley had the largest room and a nice desk. And it was occupied from time to time by Joseph Power. That was because Joseph Power was a real estate agent for Cook County and he wasn't in the office all of the time.

Richard J. Daley's office was also used as a conference room. There was another office that was occupied by William J. Lynch. There was a third office occupied by George Schaller at one desk and Francis Reilly at the other desk. We were new then. We had one girl, who was the secretary. When she went to lunch, I sat at her desk and took the phone calls for Richard J. Daley and so forth.

He didn't come into the office after 1950 for office meetings. He came into the office twice between January and April of 1955. I got this information from Florence Moran, the chief secretary. He came in unannounced. He received no phone calls. He made no phone calls. And he left after about an hour. That happened twice. We concluded that he wanted to go someplace to rest, perhaps, and not be bothered. It's ironic because you'd go to your law office to not be seen. That's a fact. Now, that's all that I can recall at the moment. Maybe you want to ask me some questions. But that's the way it was.

FR: The secretary told me when he came in. I wouldn't know it myself. When he came in unannounced to the office, when he sat at his desk, he received no phone calls and he

made no phone calls out. He was in the office for approximately one hour, according to Florence Moran, who was the secretary. We'd talk later on. But it was very unusual to see Mayor Daley in his office after 1950. It was unusual. That's because, as you know, he became the director of revenue. He became the elected Cook County clerk. He came in unannounced. Now, I can't think of anything at the moment that you should know because I'd have to make it up. And I won't make anything up. I'll tell you that. I won't do that.

JMW: So the law office was founded in 1947?

FR: It was 1946. And it was at One Thirty North Wells. I was always told that it would be a temporary location because they wanted to be on La Salle Street. And no location was available on La Salle Street in late 1946. That was the reason they gave. They came right over. And they were at Thirty Three North La Salle for many, many years. Do you have questions, now?

DWV: Yes. I have several questions. You said Richard J. Daley would get phone calls before 1950. Did he get a lot of phone calls at the office, even though he wasn't there frequently?

FR: No. We did not. But he had mail coming in, for some reason. Mail was coming in to Richard J. Daley in 1949 and in 1950. And it was my job to deliver the mail to the deputy county clerk's office, which he occupied. It was an appointed position. But for some reason, the mail dropped off after 1950. I remember going over there after 1950. I can only tell you that. Why? I don't know. But of course, he was elected county clerk sometime. We were there in 1951 and got the license. So I assume that his mail went to the county clerk's office, once he was elected the county clerk. As you know, he was the director of revenue for the state of Illinois before he was the mayor. I don't know about those things, since they don't pertain to the law firm. I've never attempted to document anything beyond the law firm.

JMW: I know that he obviously didn't practice a whole lot of law. But what was the mayor's specialty, if he had one?

FR: (FR holds up a zero). But no, he was a legislator, a senator. And he worked at it. He was extremely aware of legislation that was passed while he was a state senator. I've had other people tell me, like Judge Marovitz when he was a legislator, instead of going to a club outside of Springfield he worked. And he had a keen knowledge of legislation that was passed while he was in the state legislature. I want to emphasize extreme knowledge. He would discuss legislation that was passed, but nothing to do with the practice of law. Is that clear?

JMW: Yes.

FR: But he would discuss it. I'm told, and it's all hearsay, it was because he was a worker in the legislature, rather than a playboy, to exaggerate. But I'm glad you asked that question. He did. His ears went up when we had a lawsuit in our office, that he picked up right away because he was instrumental in having that bill passed, either as a sponsor or working to get it passed. So it wasn't just that one law. He was very familiar with everything that was passed when he was a legislator. He discussed it in 1949, and again in 1950, when we had the meetings.

*****END OF INTERVIEW*****