

J. Millard Tawes: What

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CRISFIELD, Md., is a town of about 3,000 with at least 10 churches, no movie theater, about a dozen crab houses, a "retirement village," a marina and a practically inexhaustible supply of good old boys. Because it grew up around a new rail line toward the end of the Nineteenth Century seafood boom when watermen were taking double digit millions of bushels of oysters out of the bay every year, Crisfield is an outdoor museum of wooden Victorian jigsaw architecture, much of it now being restored.

With its western-gold-rush sort of air, it is like no other place in Maryland and there is something else unique there.

It is J. Millard Tawes and he is 85 years old today.

As the Maryland voter now wearily knows, Mr. Tawes is Maryland's only living elected former governor whose career was untainted by scandal. He presided over the turbulent 1960's when the riots and the students and the Beatles and the hippies came.

Today, he works two or three days a week in a modest, paneled office of storefront type on Crisfield's Main street.

"I can't afford a secretary," says the former governor as he uses a modified hunt-and-peck technique employing more than two fingers, answering the mail that still rolls in from all over Maryland. He walks to the nearby post office to pick it up. The setting is far different from the

antiqued splendors of Annapolis and Government House, where Tawes spent eight years, or the days of glory as a White House guest during the Kennedy-Johnson years. He rents his Main street building from his son. Next door is an antique store of flea market type with fake asphalt brick peeling along a ramshackle facade that is also decorated with a National Bo beer sign.

The Tawes gubernatorial years opened in 1958 with a let's-put-it-all-together-for-unity type of campaign. The "good guy" image took, and Mr. Comptroller Tawes became Governor Tawes at the same time remaining more or less what he was and is, the uncontested and ceremonious king of Maryland's Eastern Shore, but his reign was anything but peaceful.

Mr. Tawes is one reason why you can't play a one-armed bandit in Maryland anymore. He is one reason why there is probably a slick, new multi-million-dollar community college or University of Maryland branch near you. He is one reason why Maryland passed the first public accommodation law south of the Mason-Dixon line. And he is one reason why Baltimore city's antiquated magistrate courts no longer exist.

The Maryland countryside is littered with new industries that Mr. Tawes helped to lure here. He founded the state's economic development apparatus. There is talk now of setting up a visitor's center on state land in Crisfield harbor, complete with a Tawes museum.

Despite these weighty things, there are

His Day Is Like Now

those who see the Tawes years as largely caretaker ones, a sort of figurehead operation which did little to stem the avalanche of political scandal that was to engulf Maryland in the early 1970's.

"He was a good horse trader," says one major political commentator and there are probably few political insiders in the state who would deny that the behind-the-scenes Mr. Tawes was a master politician, or close to it. And all of it was done from the relatively thinly populated, statisticaly-static power base of the Eastern Shore.

Today's power base for Mr. Tawes — the place where mayors and state officials drop by for sage advice on bay and shore affairs—is a huge clubroom about 40 feet long, added to his rambling, waterfront home in Crisfield during 1976.

It's a virtual museum of national politics and local affairs, a staggering array of memorabilia. There's a huge mandala made up of dozens of silver scissors the governor used in opening Maryland highways at ribbon cuttings. There's a Henry Berge medallion of the governor in bronze and also the plaster cast of his official state bust now in Annapolis. There's a chandelier from the old Carvel Hall hotel, Annapolis, torn down to build restore the Paca house. There's an ash tray from Gov. "Big Jim" Rhodes of Ohio and a medal from Pope Paul VI, presented when His Holiness visited the United Nations. There's a big round table inlaid with dozens of 1921 silver dollars and the Maryland State Seal, huge engraved ceremonial boxes in silver plate and wall-mounted re-

plicas of the Bowie knife and the Buffalo Bill knife.

Then there are the chairs — chairs of varying type, a Kennedy rocker from the governor of North Carolina, a judge-like chair with the Maryland seal presented by John Connolly of Texas, a chair from Gov. Pat Brown, father of the present California incumbent, and an upholstered chair from the governor of Kentucky made out of a bourbon barrel. It's a chair he admires.

"I sit in it to watch TV. It's a doggone good chair," says Mr. Tawes who offers you the Kennedy rocker hospitably.

In comes Mrs. Tawes, happy, excited, and also elegant and charming and a first lady of Annapolis if there ever was one. She has just read about a woman (Jane

Burke Byrne) being elected mayor of Chicago. "Did you think she had a chance to win?" she asks us. "Good for her!" she exclaims as she leaves for an eye appointment in Salisbury.

Then you settle down for the birthday questions:

What do you think of the world situation?

"Right now there are so many danger spots in the world . . . I wouldn't want to be President of the United States in a climate like this. I have no solution to these problems. I hope the presidential advisers will be able to deal with it in a judicial and calm manner."

Other than Governor, what was your most rewarding state job?

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"Being secretary of the Department of Natural Resources and unifying six agencies under one umbrella. . . . I was then up in my late 70's."

What is Crisfield's biggest current need?

"We have to enlarge the Somers Cove marina. It's so small it's embarrassing. And we need more jobs in the face of a slowly diminishing seafood business. We have an unemployment rate of 15 or 16 per cent. We used to have 65 or 70 seafood businesses. Now we're down to 10 or 12. Only the larger ones have survived. And we need a deepwater port."

Where were you the day of Dallas?

"I was at the Alexander hotel in Hagerstown with Franklin Roosevelt working on the Appalachia program. We said goodbye. I told the driver not to turn on the radio. I wanted to take a nap. At Ellicott City the police radio broke in and said reporters wanted to know when I would be back in Annapolis. That's how we learned the President had been shot. I went to the viewing along with Haile Selassie and Prince Philip."

What do you think of Maryland's present finances?

"The rapid rise in the budget has got to

be given very careful consideration. . . . When I was comptroller, there was practically no change, less than \$1 billion . . . now it's more than \$4 billion. The spending program has to be reviewed more carefully. The governor and his staff have a real stake in the outcome of who gets what from available revenue."

What did you think of the reversal in the Mandel case?

"Some people predicted it. It came as a pleasant piece of news to some people and was unpleasant to others . . . annoying to the press."

What achievement would you like to be remembered for?

"Education. I'd like to be remembered for our program when we enlarged both public and private education. We had just been through the shock of Sputnik. Maryland was generally low in scientific opportunities. By putting these colleges all through the state you made it possible to go to school in your own areas. People could commute as day students. It's holding down the costs of getting a degree."

How do you stay so alert and youthful?

"I involve myself in things that require a little brainpower and a little muscle."

Then you hop in the Tawes family's nine-passenger, 1974 station wagon ("We got it for my wife's bridge club") and Mr. Tawes drives you on a tour of the Crisfield waterfront. He points out the highlights, chatting all the while about bay lore. "Crabs love grassy bottoms where they can survive," he says, speaking with the barest touch of a shore accent, saying "aboot" for about and "oot of the hoose" for out of the house.

At the Somers Cove natural resources dock, the Crisfield terminal, he stops to chat with crew members and show you the J. Millard Tawes. It's a hulking, retired Coast Guard hydrographic survey ship, hardly likely to win any styling awards. "I wasn't too happy when they named the boat for me. Everybody thinks I own it." The front of the boat has been scarred by Bay ice cutting operations and looks very much under the weather.

"We've got the beacons and buoys back where they belong," says one of the crew members.

Mr. Tawes seems pleased. Then he drives you around town, chatting at random: "I'm a life member of the fire department. I've always taken an interest in volunteer firemen. They do a good job.

They've brought down the insurance rate based on their ability to respond."

He tells you that the lower Main street landfill is held up by millions of oyster shells. "In this part of Crisfield we're only inches above water. Our problem here is water. Whenever we have a heavy rain it hangs around for a long time," he says.

YOU make a brief stop at his boyhood home on Asbury avenue, the place where he was born in 1894. It's a huge rambling porticoed thing right on the county line, half restored, and with its original stained glass. "Mother had a beautiful rose garden," Mr. Tawes says, adding that the family home, no longer owned by a Tawes, was the first home built in its part of town.

Lunch is staged at Aunt Em's, a plate lunch sort of, a place that doesn't bother with dinner much in mid-winter and is encrusted with rope-draped models of crabs, lobsters and sea shells.

"There's my minister over there, he's the one with the hat on. He's in here every day," says Mr. Tawes.

The governor reminisces about Bennett Cerf, famed humorist and Random House editor. Mr. Cerf came in handy when Mr.

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Tawes wanted a Random House distribution center at Westminster, which the town got. Then the New York editor cooperated in a Tawes practical joke, played on the Maryland press. A complete book was made up, with a stamped cover reading "What I Know About Politics," by J. Millard Tawes. For weeks it sat on the gubernatorial desk while the press itched to know what was inside and score an "exclusive."

Finally, the governor called in a senior member of the press and showed him the book. It had totally blank pages.

He chuckles and you leave for his office. "My mail is fairly heavy but the office is a saving grace," he adds.

HE leafs through a stack of mail ... a man protesting the farmer's march on Washington, a note about a Salvation Army banquet, a Maryland State Police retirement dinner invitation at the World Trade Center, a bid from the Pittsville Volunteer Fire Department, a date at the University of Baltimore, a note about a prayer breakfast with Salisbury's mayor and other stray samples of downhome Maryland doings.

The office has a single space-heater, a small bathroom, battered 1920-ish desks and chairs and walls that are encrusted with Maryland memorabilia.

"My wife won't let me have the cartoons at home," he says as he waves his hand across a wall full of them, framed newspaper and magazine art that needled him during his Annapolis years. There are hundreds of things hanging up there, a photo of the old icebreaker *Latrobe*, scrapped in 1958; a big Bicentennial poster from the Grand Lodge of the Knights of Pythias; Mayor Kelley's gaudy-blue shadowbox displaying the be-ribboned blue key to Ocean City; a picture of a Chesapeake Bay retriever; a letter from Lyndon Johnson; an autographed picture of Democratic superboss James A. Farley; a volunteer fireman's backpatch; the seal of Dorchester county and the seal of Somerset county; the keys to Crisfield (crossed crab and oyster knives); his 1913 business school degree, framed, and a color rendering of the Maryland pavilion at the New York World's Fair.

"It supported itself because we got a corner on the food market and had a little money left over," says Mr. Tawes of the New York extravaganza. Behind one desk there's a Tawes "family crest" presented to him by literary wags long ago. It shows

Former Gov. J. Millard Tawes and Mrs. Tawes will be honored today, beginning at 5 P.M. at a \$35-a-plate black-tie dinner at the Blue Crest North, Pikesville. The Tawes Birthday Committee, a state group of volunteers, is sponsoring the event for the benefit of the Tawes Foundation. The foundation is working toward creation of a memorial library and exhibit at Crisfield, to house the former governor's papers and other memorabilia associated with his administration.



Mr. Tawes walks past his boyhood home on Asbury avenue, Crisfield, where he was born in 1894. The house, restored, is no longer owned by a Tawes. Below, the ex-governor pauses in a hallway and gestures to items in their home.

dollar signs marching through the chevron and a crab where the knight's helmet usually is and it reports the family motto on its scroll as "etcetera, etcetera, etcetera."

Then there is time for one more question. When are you going to write your memoirs?

"I can't," he says. "A lot of people have talked to me about it. I can't motivate myself to do it. Maybe I will if I live long enough," he adds. The governor gets out his state papers, edited by the University of Maryland and published by the Hall of Records in 1967. "I consider these enough," he says, patting the fat, official-looking volumes. The papers are useful for when Tawes has to go to speaking engagements "I see what I said, dress it up and then I'm ready to go."

Now it is time for the mail. Mr. Tawes walks to the post office and returns with a parcel post package and a stack of miscellany.

You remember how often he had talked about his roots. There is no nostalgia or regret to it at all.

"Everyone said, 'Why do you want to go back to Crisfield?' I told them my roots go back too deep here. I couldn't be happy unless I could be around watermen and boats. I go to crab and oyster houses just to smell the odor of crabs and oyster shells. It's a soothing experience to be around it," he says. □

