

11 of 15 DOCUMENTS

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HEADLINE: J. Millard Tawes Dies, Was Maryland Governor for 8 Years

BYLINE: By David A. Maraniss, Washington Post Staff Writer

BODY:

J. Millard Tawes, 85, the unobtrusive Eastern Shoreman whose mastery of Maryland's courthouse political style sustained him through five decades of public service, including eight years as governor, died of a heart attack yesterday at his home in Crisfield.

Gov. Tawes, a conservative Democrat with the manners of a smalltown bookkeeper, served as governor from 1959 to 1967, an era when profound social and political forces were challenging, and dissolving the state's rural, southern-oriented traditions, the very traditions of which Tawes was a product.

It was during his administration that Maryland became the first state south of the Mason-Dixon line to enact a public accommodations law, a milestone in the black civil rights movement. Gov. Tawes also was the chief executive when the General Assembly passed its first reapportionment law basing state representation on the one-man, one-vote principle.

In both cases, the governor was a man in the middle.

He did not vigorously oppose the civil rights and reapportionment measures, as did most of his Eastern Shore colleagues, nor did he actively push for their enactment, as many Democrats in Baltimore and the Washington suburbs wanted him to do. Instead, he stayed upstairs in his State House office and counted the votes - "a passive mediator," as one columnist put it at the time.

"That was the governor's essence," recalled Odell Smith, his former press secretary. "He didn't get on the bandwagon for change, but he didn't oppose things that he saw as inevitable."

Indeed, from 1929, when he was elected clerk of courts in his native Somerset County, to 1975, when he finally retired from his last public office, that of state treasurer, Gov. Tawes' political career was marked by an extraordinary ability to situate himself in the middle of contending geographic, economic and political interests.

Gov. Tawes pronounced his own political epitaph back in 1958 when he announced for governor with words: "I have never been a controversial figure in Maryland politics."

It was a trait that served him well within the clubhouse political circles of his time and also at the ballot box. In all of his campaigns for court clerk, state comptroller and governor, Gov. Tawes was defeated only once, in the 1946 primary for governor. Even then, he quickly made amends with the man who defeated him, Gov. W. Preston Lane,

J. Millard Tawes Dies, Was Maryland Governor for 8 Years The Washington

who appointed him state banking commission.

Gov. Tawes was born in Crisfield on April 8, 1894, the middle son of lumber executive James Tawes. For most of his first 35 years, he stayed in Crisfield, serving as the treasurer for his father's various enterprises in the lumber, baking and shipbuilding industries.

Although his family was politically well-connected, James Millard Tawes showed little interest in public life until a friend approached him in 1929 and begged him to run for clerk of courts.

The friend was running for state senate that year, and believed that the Tawes name on the same ticket would help bring in votes. Gov Tawes obliged the friend ran, and won. The friend lost.

After serving in the clerkship for eight years, Gov. Tawes ran for state comptroller on a ticket headed by Baltimore Mayor Howard W. Jackson. Again, Governor Tawes won and his running mate lost. From 1938 to 1958, with only one interruption, he served as state comptroller. His popularity was such that in most election years the opposition did not bother to field a candidate.

The comptroller's office was then located in Baltimore. Gov. Tawes set up a second home at the Emerson Hotel and on weekends took the ferry across the Chesapeake Bay to visit his wife, Helen Avalynne Gibson Tawes, and two children, who remained in Crisfield.

His presence in Baltimore for those 20 years helped him develop strong ties to some of the city's most influential political brokers and bosses, men who had to be wooed by any politician with statewide ambitions. According to one of those men, George Hocker, chief lobbyist for the liquor industry, Gov. Tawes, although an Eastern Shoreman "was known by us and considered one of us."

Thus, when Gov. Tawes prepared for his campaign for governor in 1958, the powerful bosses in Baltimore actually preferred him to their own mayor, Thomas D'Alexandro Jur., who also was interested in the party's gubernatorial nomination. It was in a proverbial smoke-filled room that the Baltimore leaders convinced D'Alesandro to drop his gubernatorial ambitions and run for the U.S. Senate with Gov. Tawes on what was called the "Harmony Ticket."

Gov. Tawes defeated his GOP opponent that year, James P. Devereux, by what then was the largest majority in state history. He became Maryland's 54th governor and, at age 63, the oldest governor in the nation. In keeping with his career as a bookkeeper, Gov. Tawes was sworn in on a stack of Bibles opened to a parable that describes the rewards and approval that a lord bestows on two servants who invest his money wisely and harsh treatment of a third who does not.

As soon as he took office, Gov. Tawes discovered that he could not make everybody happy. His first antagonist was The Baltimore Sun, whose editorial writers attacked the new governor for dispensing patronage plums to political boss James H. (Jack) Pollack. Gov. Tawes's decision to give Pollack's son-in-law a job as a magistrate, the Sun said, "was a crass exercise in political patronage."

"It was terrible that first year," recalled Smith, the governor's former aide. "It was the worst press I'd ever seen a governor get." Gov. Tawes, again demonstrating his desire not to make enemies, eventually withdrew some of the nominations that most angered The Sun.

During his eight years in the governor's office, Gov. Tawes portrayed himself as a fiscal conservative and said he found great joy in balancing the budget each year.

Yet, it was during those eight years that state government began a spiraling growth rate that continued through the 1970s. When Gov. Tawes entered office, the state budget was about \$448 million. By the time he turned over the reigns of government to his successor, Spiro T. Agnew, the budget topped \$1 billion.

J. Millard Tawes Dies, Was Maryland Governor for 8 Years The Washington

While civil rights and reapportionment were the essential issues of his era, Gov. Tawes never mentioned the enactment of laws in those areas among his notable accomplishments. He always said he was most proud of his reorganization of the state's higher education system and the establishment of a department of economic development.

Upon learning of Gov. Tawes' death many Maryland politicians recalled the former governor's length of service and his good humor.

Gov. Harry Hughes, a fellow Eastern Shoreman, said Gov. Tawes was his "good friend and good adviser" and would command "the lifelong respect of his contemporaries."

Former Gov. Mandel, who appointed Gov. Tawes to a cabinet post (Department of Natural Resources) when the late governor was 75 years old, remembered some Tawes stories. One was about a man who approached Tawes at a funeral for an Eastern Shore legislator and said: "Governor I'd like to take his place."

Without even looking at the man, Gov. Tawes drawled: "Well, that's all right with me, but you'd better check with the undertaker."

Judge Robert J. Sweeney, chief of Maryland's district courts, said that Gov. Tawes' quick wit was still with him in his 85th year.

"A few months ago, I mistakenly introduced him as Millard E. Tawes," Sweeney recalled. As soon as he got up to speak he looked at me and said:

"How quickly they forget."

Gov. Tawes' survivors include his wife, a daughter, Jimmie Lee Wilson of Salisbury and a son Philip of Crisfield.

CORRECTION-DATE: June 29, 1979, Friday, Final Edition

CORRECTION:

The full name of former Maryland Gov. J. Millard Tawes, who died Monday at age 85, was incorrectly stated in a Washington Post obituary and subsequent editorial. His name was John Millard Tawes.

GRAPHIC: Picture 1, J. Millard Tawes, governor of Maryland for eight years during five decades of public service, died yesterday at his home in Crisfield on the Eastern Shore. He was 85.; Picture 2, J. Millard Tawes, left, enjoyed lunching with friends like waterman Carl Tyler, in his Crisfield hometown. AP