

Interview with Marvin C. Schumann
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Interviewed by Calvin Gower and John Waldron

This interview is being conducted by Calvin Gower and John Waldron, in association with the Central Minnesota Historical Society, with Mr. Marvin C. Schumann, a former legislator, on July 17, 1973.

Waldron: Mr. Schumann, we usually start off with general questions. When were you born?

Schumann: I was born in 1906 in Rice, Minnesota. Graham Township.

Waldron: What day were you born?

Schumann: May 19th

Waldron: Could you give us some general information on your background, education, growing up, etc.?

Schumann: I was born on the home farm of a family of eight – two brothers, and five sisters, grew up on the home farm – it was a rural farm family – attended the local country school. After graduation from the eighth grade, some years later I attended the school of Agriculture at the University of Minnesota.

Waldron: Okay. What made you get involved with politics? Was this a long thing or just a sudden thing?

Schumann: My interest in politics developed through the years, just as my interest in local community objectives developed. I first served on the local school board in Rice, Minnesota. I was active in various local organizations and then, in 1944, I was appointed to fill a vacancy on the board of county commissioners. I served in that capacity for ten years. Then, because of my personal interest in politics and support from friends, I decided to file for the office of representative and was successful in that endeavor. I served seven terms and that concluded my active participation in politics, though I am still interested in politics and in the operation of the government.

Waldron: Was your father in politics at all?

Schumann: My father was quite active in community affairs. My father moved here with his parents in 1887 – and in the course of the years he became active in some of the business organizations, a mutual fire insurance company that my grandfather and uncle helped to organize. He was an officer in that organization. He helped organize and was one of the original officers of the Farmers Co-operative Creamery in Rice. He served on the school board and the town board and, oh, some of those early farm programs in dry depression years when they first instituted some of the early farm programs. He had an active interest in politics, too, though he never attempted to serve in a higher capacity than local town board.

Gower: Was your father an immigrant from Germany?

Schumann: Yes. He came over as a boy of seven. He came with his parents. They first settled in LeMars, Iowa, then moved up to Minnesota. The family has been here continually since that time.

Gower: I'll go then to your campaign of 1954. What was the make-up of District 45?

Schumann: District 45 at that time was all Benton County and that part of Sherburne County incorporated into East St. Cloud.

Gower: That was essentially be a rural county, a rural district, wouldn't you say?

Schumann: The district, at that time, was perhaps about 60% rural and the rest urban. Sauk Rapids and East St. Cloud would be considered, and I would identify it, as urban, where the rest of the county we would commonly term rural.

Waldron: I'd like to go back to when you served on the board of county commissioners before we get going any further. Exactly what position did you hold and what did you do on that?

Schumann: I was appointed to serve as one of the five members of the Benton County Board of Commissioners, then I was re-elected to several successive terms. County Commissioners are the governing body of the county – the official body of the county – and we were responsible for the policy that was adopted. Not only did we serve as County Commissioners, but we served on other boards as well. We were members of the Welfare Board and it was our responsibility to set up the budget. Other than the elected offices, we would fill vacancies among the county employees when the occasion occurred. We were responsible for the finances of the county, the highway department. We adopted, or recommended, or approved, the program for the highway department. Other departments would have to come to us for our approval on many of the thing that they did. Some of the offices that are elected have direct responsibility by law, but there still was a working relationship because of the County Commissioners' approval of the budget and the decision that we made, insofar as, affected the amount of tax money, that we would need. It would reflect back on the taxpayer of the county. So we were responsible to the citizen of the county in the duties of our office.

Waldron: Because of your ten years on the county board of commissioners in Benton County, did you find fitting into the House of Representatives when you were first elected easy to adjust to?

Schumann: Yes. I think it was much easier for me that it would have been for someone who came in there with no previous experience of any kind because of the fact as a county commissioner I found that it was necessary at times to contact our representative and also express our views on legislation – legislation that might affect the county in one way or another. We were concerned and we would work with our representative, our Senate and House member. On welfare, we had the responsibility of working with the welfare department and I was chairman of the board for a number of years as county commissioner. The chairman, of course, is the spokesman for the group, so to some extent to carrying out contracts, and as spokesman, expressing the opinion of the group, we had a working relationship with the legislature before I was elected and served.

Gower: Who was your opponent in the 1954 election?

Schumann: I suppose I should properly say that the representative at that time was John T. Kosloske and I filed, so it perhaps would be more proper to say that I was his opponent rather than he mine.

Gower: How many times had he served?

Schumann: Mr. Kosloske was a qualified man. He had served three terms so he had gained experience that comes along with serving down there in the legislature. I firmly believe that any man who served there several terms, is much more qualified that when he first went down there.

Gower: Was he labeled as a liberal and you a conservative? Or how was that?

Schumann: Well, at that time, of course, it was non-partisan. The conservative/liberal label comes along in the course of events when you get down there and organized and elect your speaker of the House. He had initially served two terms as a liberal and then his third terms he caucused with the conservatives. I can only speak for myself and say that my political philosophy was confirmed conservative.

Gower: So, in a sense, it was two conservatives running against each other in 1954?

Schumann: Yes, that is correct, at that time. His last term he had caucused with the conservatives.

Gower: Was there any so-called “liberal” candidate running in the 1954 election?

Schumann: No. There was only him and me in the '54 election, if memory serves me correctly. The following election, he and I were again opponents, and then there was an announced liberal filed and we had a primary election.

Gower: To what would you attribute your victory over Mr. Kosloske in 1954?

Schumann: I don't know if anyone can determine how elections turn out. A representative is in a position, I know from experience, you gain friends, you also develop opposition in the course of the years. It's just natural in politics at that level and I could only say that I would attribute the win to the fact that more people voted for me, which might be an indication that I had more friends among the voters or that the voters elected me with a greater degree of confidence in my ability to carry out the responsibility of the office.

Gower: do you think that your being a farmer would have helped you against Mr. Kosloske, who, I believe, is a resident of Sauk Rapids?

Schumann: No. I don't believe that my farming background really was a determining factor. I would rather feel that it was just an election between two men who were well known in the county and I couldn't attribute it to any one single thing, no could I attribute, or necessarily want to give the impression that I was elected because of the fact that I had greater ability. I feel that Mr. Kosloske had done a creditable job and he was a personal friend, in a way, and by that I mean we were well acquainted. My reason for filing was because of the support that I got and largely because I was challenged by the responsibility of the office. I felt that if Mr. Kosloske were elected, we could be friends, it went the other way, and by and by, we remained friends.

Gower: Around 1962, they changed your district number from 45 at large, I believe, to 27. What was incorporated in this change?

Schumann: If my memory serves me correctly and without researching it out, my explanation is this: at that time, they, the state, was reapportioned and our district remained the same, but the change was made throughout the state, and the only difference was, as I recall, was that change in the number of the district.

Gower: And then again around 1964, or 1966, they changed your district again from 27 to 51-B. This time they added part of Stearns County, right? What influence did this have on your losing the election, say in 1968?

Schumann: I don't believe that had any effect in so far as an ultimate resulting election defeat, because I was strongly supported in that additional area that was added to my former district. I would explain the defeat, that I mentioned once before: that it's a position of controversy, that

you make friends and you also build up opposition so, in the course of the years, it's inevitable that, some opposition will build up. Also, the desire on the part of some of the people for change. I held the office for seven terms, some felt that was long enough. Political trends are factors, too, sometimes on the national level, sometimes it may be on the state level that it has some effect on the local legislative race. Different candidates – different opposition – makes for a different situation. We see that time and time again when candidates win elections and lose elections.

Gower: Were there any of those elections that you were in from 1954 through 1968 in which you had no opposition?

Schumann: No. We always had a primary with the exception of the first election.

Gower: Did you win by a fairly good margin in the general election every-time until 1968?

Schumann: No. As I would identify this election, this district, was one of the marginal districts. I would have strong opposition at times, and I never won by a large margin, nor was I ever defeated by what I would call a “landslide.”

Gower: So it was a close district almost all the time that you were running, or all the time that you were in it.

Schumann: Yes. It was known throughout the state, state-wide among the representatives, as one of the “swing” districts.

Gower: There is one other question. I don't know whether this is sort of interjected here or not but how do you feel about the change from non- partisan designation of legislators?

Schumann: Well, in my opinion, it makes the office more political than it was. I believe we would be more likely to elect a representative or at least we could elect a representative on his

political background rather than his ability. I believe that's a factor, I think it would even make it somewhat of a factor in the way political trends go. In a district, where your Republican/Democratic strength is fairly evenly divided, national trends, state trends, political action, political popularity of some individual might be a factor, or some political publicity that develops favorable or unfavorable feelings could be a factor. I did feel, and still feel, that a state that has as many legislators as we do, gives the individual citizen the right or the opportunity to get to know the individual quite well if he has any particular interests in getting to know the individuals as politicians. While I believe strongly in a two-party system, I don't feel that it adds too much in the way of what I would call better state government as a result of party designation.

Gower: During your years in the House did you ever think about running for, like say, state senate, as a bigger political office than just the House?

Schumann: [No response]

Gower: Mr. Schumann felt that he would rather not answer that question.

Waldron: Okay. Another question. Since you served in what you called a "swing" district, or a marginal district, and now with the chance you're going to lose every two years, you get in the House and there's a chance that you're going to lose every two years – do you find that it hinders you in making up legislation, and that?

Gower: What he's getting at is, do you think it would be better to have longer terms in the House?

Schumann: No. In my opinion, I wouldn't consider a longer term more desirable. I think I know, or knew, from my experience what it required, in the way of campaign, to be elected to

office, but the challenge is there and if you can't measure up to the challenge, well, that's the way the ball bounces. I personally, believe firmly in electing our officials. I like to see an election. I think it gives the people the only real opportunity to express themselves, and whenever we lengthen the term or remove somebody from an elective office in my opinion, it's a step backwards. I firmly believe in the elective system – it's the only way that I see that individuals have a real opportunity to express themselves. If the official doesn't measure up to what you should expect of him, you are given the opportunity of voting for someone else.

Gower: Do you think, then, it was a bad move when the governor's term was moved to four years?

Schumann: Well, perhaps I might contradict myself a bit and say no. Personally, I do not feel that the lengthening of the Governor's term to four years would be quite the same as lengthening representative terms to four years. We still have them on the ballot and what it does do is give them a continuity of office for four years so that he can work more effectively and I would feel a little different – I feel that the governors' term of four years is all right just for that reason. I think he can more effectively carry out the responsibilities of his office than a two-term provided him before. But at the end of four years, if he hasn't proven himself, why, then he comes up for election. The governor's responsibilities are not as broad as the average individual is led to believe. Our state government runs pretty much on department heads – some of the offices are elected and I don't like to see any more of them go off the ticket either at the present time, so it permits some diversification of authority there. He serves on several boards with other members, and groups, and if he recommends a budget to this session of the legislature, and he isn't reelected, his term is almost over before that budget runs – runs out – and the people haven't had a chance to see, at that time, as they might, how well he performed the responsibilities of his job.

Gower: Also do you think that the executive branch has a different role than the House – the legislative branch, and therefore would it be okay for him to have the four-year term, and the legislature – the House of Representatives has only a two-year term?

Schumann: Yes. I would like to see the state officials, those on the state ticket, all have four-year terms and that would include the justices of the Supreme Court, too, in my opinion.

Gower: Just one other thing. Did you enjoy campaigning in the various election years?

Schumann: Well, someone who runs for elective office should enjoy meeting people and I would say, that through the years I found it rewarding to meet people – to get to know people. One of the difficulties I recognize is the fact that people would get to know me more personally than I would get to know them. It's kind of one of those things you run up against. People say, "Oh, hello" in a personal way when you can't recognize or remember their name, or if you ever knew it. Of course, there are times when you run into some situation where people don't like you and frankly tell you so, which is a little less than pleasant, but that's to be expected.

Waldron: During your years in the House, could you tell us any of the example of some of the major bills you authored and passed?

Schumann: I served on a number of committees during the years that I was down there. I served on the Highway Committee, Dairy Products and Livestock Committee, Welfare Committee. Later on I was on the Tax Committee and various other committees. I was on the Forestry Committee. It changed from time to time. Every speaker at every session would make some committee changes. I had legislation. I was chairman of the Dairy Products and Livestock Committee the last three terms I served there, that's the rural agricultural committee dealing with problems related to the dairy industry. Some of the major legislation that I supported was in that

field. Often as not, the bills would come to me and I would pick out some friends – members – who I had confidence in and ask them to author them. One of the bills I tried to pass a good many years which finally succeeded – was a bill increasing the indemnity on livestock payments, when cattle were condemned for - fever. My interest was often in the field of agriculture, though not alone in that direction. I authored bills one bill I was primary author on was a bill pertaining to the retirement of volunteer fireman. Without checking back over all the bills I usually was on, I averaged about 30 per year. In seven terms that's quite a number of bills, and successfully passed a good number of them. I would just like to add this, after serving down there, though the number of terms that I did, as an illustration, I served on the Welfare Committee throughout my entire term of experience and it became quite customary for the welfare department – with some of the legislation they felt was important- giving it to someone with experience and ask them to author the legislation for them and carry it through. There was considerable legislation in that direction.

Waldron: During your time in, and right now with the new legislature, do you find that the pay was sufficient?

Schumann: Oh, at the time I was first elected to office we weren't paid a salary. We were paid \$2,000 for the first year and we were paid \$1,000 for the second year of the term. That was changed, I don't recall when, sometime in the course of the years. I believe I only served one year on that basis, then we were on a salary of \$200 a month plus expenses, until the last year when the salary went to \$400 a month and now it's \$700, I believe. I did feel in my own mind that \$700 was a rather substantial increase. Of course, the way prices/inflation is going right now, why, perhaps it isn't as far out of line as it seemed at the time when the new salary was adopted. I do object on my own part to the trend in the way on which the salaries, on the greater

level- statewide and national wide- are constantly being forced up. I believe the rate of increase is greater than can be justified.

Gower: Did you hire someone to work on your farm while you were in the legislature?

Schumann: No, I was not tied down to the direct operation of the farm so it was not a factor as far as I was concerned. I always had free time to serve down there and, for that reason, it was relatively comfortable for me to be away for the necessary time that it required to carry out the responsibilities of the office.

Waldron: Now that there have been some changes in 1972 in the House and, I guess, in the Senate, too – the opening of committee and sub-committee and conferences – do you feel that this is an effective way to run the government.

Schumann: Yes, I would agree that committees should be open. Our standing committees down there were always open to the public. I wouldn't have wanted it to have been otherwise. As far as the Rules Committee is concerned, there might be some argument both ways on whether they should be closed or opened. By and large, I would go along with the open committee. I believe that, after all, they have a responsibility to the citizens of the State of Minnesota and those elected officials shouldn't be uncomfortable if the committees are open. It's only proper in my line of thinking.

Waldron: During your years in the House, do you have any unusual stories to relate?

Gower: Mr. Schumann felt that he should not relate any of these stories here on tape. Mr. Schumann, another question. Who do you think were the outstanding men in the House and, if you wanted to comment, too, in the Senate during the years you were down in the house?

Schumann: I believe I would confine my remarks only to the members of the House. I would feel that, perhaps, I shouldn't make any reference to the senators, having never served with them and not knowing them that well. One of the impressions that I gained shortly after I go down there has remained with me. By and large, the Minnesota House of Representatives, and I think this would be equally true of the senators, were men of character and ability and it was their honest concern to carry out their responsibilities. I would really disagree with some, or strongly disagree with some representatives at times who, nevertheless, I admired insofar as their capacity, character, and ability to carry out the responsibilities of the office were concerned. There were men, of course who had served there a long number of years. One of the first me I got to know was Roy Dunn. He was an influential politician in this state for many years. John Hartle and some of the other men I knew later were Aubrey Dirlam and Duxbury, the Speaker for the last three terms I was down there. These were men with tremendous amounts of experience and capacity to carry on their responsibilities. I mentioned conservatives. The liberals there were a substantial number of them who I would equally call well-qualified. One of the outstanding representatives, in my book, was Representative Fred Cina. Fred showed a tremendous amount of legislative capacity. Some of those who never gained the same amount of recognition or weren't as well known, and it would be hard to name them all, but there were men who you grew to know and like and admire. I can't really say in the years I served down there that everyone served in his own best way to carry out the responsibilities of his office.

Waldron: Would you agree that there was a good feeling of respect for the fellow legislators among the members of the House while you were there?

Schumann: Yes. By and large I know of no instance where that wouldn't be true. Certainly, some of them never stayed long enough that you really got to know them. Sometimes we

couldn't help but feel somewhat disappointed that certain legislators didn't come back, but that was the effect the legislative process, or election process had.

Gower: One reason that I asked that is that we've asked that of all seven of the other people that we've interviewed, legislators and former legislators. All of them have said that they felt there was a very good feeling of respect for one another in the legislature. I've got just one last question. Did you like your years there as a legislator?

Schumann: Yes, I would say that I did. I consider it an experience that doesn't come to everyone. I felt it was a privilege to serve in the House of Representatives and see it as one of those things that I'll always look back upon. The years I served down there, the friends I got to know, and the people I got to know, the wonderful experiences, and the knowledge that one gains insofar as the responsibility of the state is concerned. The state government isn't any easy type of government to operate. You have so many cross-currents, various departments and the separation of powers. All create a different field in which to work, but many of those difficulties are, as I see it, curbs on many of the actions, that go too far afield. The course of a state government, as I see it, should remain basically constant. Whether we have a Republican as governor or a Democrat as governor. The trend shouldn't swing too far back and forth. After all, our basic problems are quite definitely established for us. You can't resolve all the problems in school by going way off in one direction and increasing state aid or taxes or something way off of the ability of the economy of the state to absorb. Experience, of course, is very important in every level of government, whether it's legislative or whether it's administrative, and certainly in the judicial field. My limited acquaintance with the Supreme Court, I always felt Minnesota had a very well-qualified panel of judges serving on our Supreme Court, and one of the privileges that was mine in serving those years was the opportunity it gave to get to know many of those

officials, those people I referred to directly and indirectly on the much more personal basis. It gives you the opportunity to evaluate their capacity and to grasp the scope of the state government. The very fact that our state government operates well. I got a directory some years ago, and if my memory serves me correctly, there were 251 or 250 state departments and agencies and bureaus of one thing or another incorporated into our state government. I'm sure that are considerably more today because of the fact that growth and problems have required additional expansion of our state government. It does take a lot of work and effort and sound planning and study to attempt to have that kind of government operating to serve the citizens of the state as it should. And I really feel the Minnesota has had good government form what I've seen in my experience. Well-qualified people like those in the offices reflect on the voting constituents in the state of Minnesota and show that they have exercised good judgement.

Gower: I just want to clarify a point here. You said state government is not an easy form of government to operate. Is that correct?

Schumann: Yes. What I mean by this is the complexity of the government – it's departments charged with certain amounts of responsibility – the official somewhere who has control of that department, as vast as it is, sometimes the best efforts fail to accomplish what the intent and purpose was. Its complexity, in itself, adds to, somewhat, the problem of efficiency and administration compared to-- Big corporations where you have a board of directors and a chairman – they make the sole decision. They can say exactly what the decision is going to be and what to do or what not to do. But in state government everyone is limited in their authority, their responsibility. As an illustration, take the conservation department. Then you get in on that and you have a number of departments: Land, Minerals, Forestry. Each one has a certain amount of limited authority and responsibility. They overlap and it sometimes crates difficulties and

inefficiencies. But those problems, I feel, should all be worked on. They're, more or less, as I see it, inherent in our democratic way of doing things.

The following segment was made after the original tape had been made.

Gower: Mr. Schumann asked on July 18th, the day after the interview, that we include the name of his wife and some information about her and the name of his children on this. Within this interview. Mr. Schumann's wife was Mildred E. Nelson, from Sauk Rapids, Minnesota, Watab Township. He and Mildred Nelson were married in 1939. They had three children: Julie Fay, Nancy Louise, and Ivan Charles.